

# **Taste, Nations and Strangers: A Socio-Cultural History of National Art Galleries with Particular Reference to Scotland**

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PhD

The University of Edinburgh  
1998



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I hereby declare that this thesis is composed solely by myself and is based on my own work

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# ABSTRACT

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In the register of a socio-cultural history this thesis attempts to unpick relations between the nation-state, class and politics as they interface with artistic and exhibitionary forms in the context of modern European, English and Scottish history. Beginning with a broad cultural history of national art museums in Europe and England, the thesis moves to a more focused socio-genesis of the National Gallery of Scotland and Edinburgh's art field, based on primary archive data. As ambiguous and double-coded spaces, national art museums emerged to cater for shifts in the structure of governance, stripping away older vestiges of monarchical or aristocratic grandeur under the aegis of the "nation", while symbolically purifying themselves of "lower" historical tendencies in the act of distinction. This happened at different speeds and according to different socio-cultural conditions in the three cases presented. The National Gallery of Scotland, it is shown, grew on the fissured terrain that was British history. Its presence threw into relief centuries of poverty, uncertainty and political dislocation, emerging as a symbol of civic and national well-being, bourgeois confidence and increasing state guidance. It grew on the fertile soil of enlightenment and Scottish civil society, later reconfigured in the context of early Victorian self-reliance, and fuelled both by romanticism and class conflict. It was the summation of pointed struggles for recognition amongst a modern group of artists, the Royal Scottish Academy, whose claims to space, coupled with a desire for autonomy, placed an incendiary in the art field. By foregrounding questions of nationhood, class and ideology, the thesis chronicles a history of prohibitions as well as invitations, tracing specific histories of institutional control and attempting to reveal how the National Gallery of Scotland's internal space - its architecture, decor, collection and codes of conduct - signalled its genesis in civic refinement, professional distinction and artistic modernisation.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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It's somehow more honest and affirmative to admit the messy realities and dialogues of life into what on the surface appears to be a unitary product of the authorial voice. Like galleries themselves, text emerges through the filters and noises of history, both prosaic and grand. It carries the weight of years of transition: personal, intellectual, political and accidental; and derives from influences far too convoluted and shapeless to recover properly in a page. So I must flatten it.

I am tempted to name this thesis after the satellite "Mir" - sporadically functional, over-elevated and derived from dodgy interpretations of Marx! More than this, though, it has passed through many personal orbits, and some of them I want to acknowledge, as follows. For encouragement, conversation and advice I'd like to thank Elizabeth Chaplin, John Orr, John Holmwood and Stana Nenadic - each in their varying ways sources of professional and personal motivation. I would particularly like to thank my supervisor John Orr for his endurance, professional support and friendship - sorry it's late John! With respect to access to materials locked away in the dusty enclaves of Edinburgh, I am indebted to the Royal Scottish Academy, the National Gallery of Scotland and the Scottish Records Office and the librarians therein. My incompetence as a historian was oft-revealed in these places and I am grateful for the tolerance and understanding of the relevant staff of these institutions, and for access to their plug-points.

On a less formal, but no less important level, I need to identify and credit a cluster of people who in disparate ways formed the kind of "support system" evaluated in Becker's *Art Worlds*. To colleagues at both Derby and Edinburgh, for providing those innumerable moments of "life", born of humour, intellect and other substances. In particular, "shouts" to Paula (☺) and Gordon, whose friendship, wisdom and knowledge taught me that wisdom and knowledge are not necessarily synonymous. To Jem, for her unique blend of strength and beauty at crucial times in this thesis. To Chris and Mads, for courage. To Christine, present even when she wasn't and who deserved more than my flawed friendship. To Sarah (the summer just got better). To the football seasons 1992-98, and those too few moments of liminality at Easter Road and White Hart Lane. To the other two points of my "triangle": to Rococo Skirts, for allowing me to fulfil that dream of flickering lights, jangly chords and on-stage *jouissance*; and to Derbyshire Badminton Team. To my brother, whose own talent, courage and humility was the reason I took up this sociology lark. And, finally, but most importantly, to my mum and dad, without whom none of this. I'm proud of you too. Thank you to the entire lot, for the entire lot.

Nick Prior  
Derby  
Summer '98

## INTRODUCTION

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“The museum...offers the cultural historian a precise exemplar of the working of ideology - the ways in which interest, whether it be of the state or of a particular class or group, permeates and patterns cultural practices and acts of communication” (Pointon, 1994: 3).

Today it goes without saying, to paraphrase Adorno (1972), that nothing concerning the world of art museums goes without saying. In a climate of international brinkmanship and hypercommodification art museums have become objects of intense scrutiny: academic, corporate, governmental, journalistic. They inhabit a space subject to the increasing excesses of the late modern in all its ambiguity, enjoying unprecedented growth yet also being transformed beyond the limits of the museological as it was shaped in the modern age. The current interest is caught in a moment of cultural inflation, academic expansion and millennial panic. On the one hand, the recent “saving” and subsequent fetishisation of Canova’s *Three Graces* from export to the Getty Museum has been heralded as a “national victory”. In the summer of 1994 the state refused to give the piece an export licence in the light of the fund-raising campaigns staged by the National Galleries of Scotland and the Victoria and Albert Museum. Instead the neo-classical piece was sent on a national tour, boxed in its own installation space and “auratised” with a set of celebratory notes. On the other hand, the developing fascination with museums is testament to the greater reflexivity that modern societies have performed towards their own institutions and heightened relations to material objects (Pearce, 1992; Vergo, 1989). Higher education, for instance, has witnessed the growth of “museum studies” departments and courses that pore over the details of object relations and material culture at the interface of (external) social forces and (internal) institutional policy.

Over the past decade, in particular, a body of work has emerged in distinction to an unencumbered light history that has recovered the best of the Marxist, post-structuralist and phenomenological approaches, without reducing itself to polemic. What emerges is a developing set of texts, born of interdisciplinary exigencies and pockets of

academic vision that renders a vigorous unpacking of the modalities of collecting, classifying and displaying (Bennett, 1995; Duncan, 1995; Fyfe, 1993; Karp and Lavine, 1991; Lorente, 1998; Lumley, 1988; McLellan, 1994; Pearce, 1992; Pointon, 1994; Pomian, 1990; Vergo, 1989). In this nascent discursive space it has been possible to level a new set of questions at the museum, based in a rethink of the nature of display, patronage, memory, power, nationhood and modernity. No longer is the museum deified as a neutral storehouse of civilization's most cherished values. It is revealed to be a vital institution in the formation of powerful ideologies, categories and identities, perpetuating dominant national myths or providing cultural cement for socio-political order (Sherman and Rogoff, 1994). In short, "theorizing museums" (Macdonald and Fyfe, 1996) has become a matter of attending to the socially and historically embedded nature of museological space, understood as a constitutive process as well as an institutional structure.

While the art museum is not the analytical demarcation of this thesis, it still forms the main target.<sup>1</sup> The aim is to "problematize" the evolution of an institution that has too readily remained under the protective guardianship of national tradition (heritage) and cultural authority. The thesis seeks to find useful ways of bringing the art museum's genesis into focus by taking seriously both Fyfe's (1993) call for scrutiny of the role of class and nation-state in the emergence of national galleries and Pointon's for an analysis of the "politics of cultural control in which terms such as 'public' and 'access' have a long and problematic history" (Pointon, 1994: 1). It should be seen, therefore, in the light of a critical socio-cultural history that aims to unpick relations between governance, class and "high" cultural forms, particularly exhibitionary forms, in the context of modern European history. Value is extracted from a range of material across disciplines such as social history, cultural sociology, political philosophy and museum studies, although the separation of these is meaningless once a process-account of cultural forms is begun (Abrams, 1982).

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<sup>1</sup> The terms "art museum" and "gallery" are used interchangeably in the thesis, for the semantic distinction (North America's tendency to call everything a museum and Britain's more specific designation of a national "gallery") is more apparent than real. Both are separated however, from non-art museums at pertinent times in the following narrative.

The problem, then, is one of arriving at an adequate, relational understanding of the evolution of the “project of the museum” (Malraux, 1954). How do we accurately chart the art museum’s birth and development? What changes in the gallery’s morphology can be detected? How were museums imbricated with the evolution of modern art worlds? Who were the art museum’s most active patrons? And to what extent did such institutions help formulate the cultural identities of these champions?

The thesis makes use of a comparative historical model based on three cases: continental Europe, England and Scotland. The model is further divided according to three historical configurations: pre-modern absolutism, eighteenth century enlightenment and nineteenth century bourgeois modernity. In each case the task has been to critically investigate the evolution of spaces of visual display in relation to particular social imperatives and configurations of rule - absolutist, enlightened and national - that assign a certain cultural efficacy to such spaces. Differential trajectories of this evolution are clearly present and contrasts are indeed developed in the three cases. If the “continental model”, particularly the Louvre, forms the *locus classicus* of museum development, then the English model is once-removed and the Scottish model twice-removed. There remains, however, distinct correspondences between cases, particularly in the widespread symbolic appropriation of art museums as realms of “distinction”.

The thrust of the argument, here, is that national art galleries are ambiguous, double-coded spaces. On the one hand they cater for shifts in the structure of governance, peeling away older remnants of monarchical or aristocratic grandeur and religious servitude. In this they open up the art museum to the emerging space of the nation, with its origins in civil society and a representative generality. On the other hand, art’s marriage with the value of “taste” connects the emblems of art with the struggle for a refined identity that was so crucial to the bourgeoisie’s historical position. Hence, the art museum becomes a contributory badge of distinction fought for by ascendant social groups in the struggle for symbolic power. For this reason the gallery is predisposed to exclude in the act of distinction; symbolically purifying itself of higher and lower historical tendencies.

By foregrounding such questions of nationhood, class and ideology, I hope to



chronicle a history of prohibitions as well as invitations, tracing specific histories of institutional control in each of the cases mentioned.<sup>2</sup> As the primary case study, however, most attention is paid to Scotland. Edinburgh's national gallery, I will argue, was the summation of pointed struggles for recognition amongst a group of modern artists, whose claims to space, coupled with a desire for autonomy, drove the art field. These struggles were tied up, in turn, with changes in the composition and power of Scotland's upper classes and the resources that certain factions could draw upon to affirm their own social and cultural interests. The outcome, in 1859, was a neo-classical space dedicated purely to art, hived off for a special form of cultivation and contemplation.

Underpinning the thesis is a set of rather diverse theories and methods drawn most commonly, but not exclusively, from neo-Marxist approaches to art and culture. Culture is approached as a problematic, not in the sense of a definitive or universal calculation, but as a process of forms, dispositions and structures; taking on varying profiles within finite limits of possibility. At base, art is, therefore, seen to be both reflective and constitutive of economic and social processes: not a set of inert, perfunctory units contained in a gallery, nor a mirror-image of "objective relations", but neither untouched by such external relations. Art works are revealed as complex forms that contribute to the production of social relations, part of the equipment whereby particular social groups maintain socio-cultural ascendancy (Wolff, 1991).<sup>3</sup> The thesis claims not merely to be an institutional analysis, therefore, but a *sociology of art* that "gets its hands dirty" with the texts, the pictures, the styles, the genres (Zolberg, 1990) (the use of almost one hundred illustrations in the text is, in this sense, vital to the overall

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<sup>2</sup> I have left relatively untouched questions of the position of women in the gallery, purely on the grounds of space, exacerbated by the lack of any archive material in my primary case study that offers itself up for meaningful analysis of this dimension of art history. Social class is the analytical "entry point", but not one that exhausts the range of investigative possibilities. Equally, I have had to curtail my analysis at the precise moment of genesis (around the mid-nineteenth century), even though the subsequent development of art fields in the cases mentioned indicates a more concerted drive towards antagonism, artistic autonomy and national regulation in the late nineteenth century.

<sup>3</sup> Or as Wolff puts it herself, "the necessary project for the study of art is an approach which integrates textual analysis with sociological investigation of institutions of cultural production and of those social and political processes and relations in which this takes place" (1991: 713).



tempo of the argument). To this extent it is also a dialogue with “new art history” (Rees and Borzello, 1986) and a call to widen the scope of Scottish art history beyond the largely uncritical realms of the rhapsodical catalogue or glossy monograph.<sup>4</sup>

The thesis operationalizes a “Bourdieuian” explanatory system of relations to investigate the gradual autonomisation of what Bourdieu calls the “field” of artistic, or cultural production: a constellation of agents, institutions and discourses that delimit the boundaries of art and within which agents struggle for legitimacy and recognition.<sup>5</sup> All social formations are structured in an hierarchically organised series of fields, for Bourdieu - political/economic, educational, scientific, legal, cultural. Each field can be defined as a structured, partially autonomous configuration of social relations and activities dependent on the different goods and resources at stake in each field (intellectual distinction in the educational field, power and wealth in the political field, or the authority to define legitimate art in the cultural field, for instance). The structure

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<sup>4</sup> “New art history” was the title given to a collection of essays and critical interventions of writers such as T. J. Clark, Victor Burgin, Paul Wood, Griselda Pollock, Linda Nead, Svetlana Alpers and members of the Open University group. All in their varying ways progenitors of an approach to art that critically assimilated concepts current in radical philosophy, political theory, sociology and cultural studies, these writers stripped away many of the myths of autonomy and majesty that had saturated art history up to the 1970s. They asked a different set of questions of visual “texts” that brought social relations of power, inequality, politics, class and gender directly into the equation of art and society. For complex reasons that must remain undeveloped Scottish art history has remained relatively untouched by the cutting edge of “new art history”, despite some attempts at a more theoretical and critical dialogue with questions of power, patronage, class and ideology in the context of Scottish art (Phillipson, 1997; Forbes, 1997). The absence of a fully developed tradition of cultural studies in Scotland is perhaps an important factor here, as is the relatively “traditional” nature of many of Scotland’s art history departments.

<sup>5</sup> For Bourdieu, the formation of the concepts *habitus* and *field* was an attempt to overcome the “absurd opposition between individual and society” that had crystallized into the paradigms of phenomenological voluntarism and mechanical structuralism (Bourdieu, 1990: 31). It was therefore a way of relaying the “subjectivity of the objective” and a contribution to the structure/agency debates of the 1970s and 1980s - a contribution which as Jenkins (1992) has noted, differed markedly to Giddens’ position in that it was grounded firmly in empirical investigations. Unfortunately, there is no room for an exegetical account of this theoretical system, even though for some it constitutes “the most elegant and comprehensive since Talcott Parsons” (DiMaggio, 1979: 1462). There is, however, a growing literature on Bourdieu, who himself is still clarifying and defending the essence of his theoretical armature (Bourdieu, 1998; Jenkins, 1992; Calhoun, 1990; DiMaggio, 1979; Garnham and Williams, 1986; Lash, 1990; Zolberg, 1992).

of a field at any given moment is determined by the particular relations existing between the positions agents occupy in that field. The field is, thus, a dynamic, protean constellation which changes in accordance with transformations in the relative positions of agents, who must possess a minimum amount of knowledge or skill to be accepted as legitimate participants (to “play the game”), but who enter with historically given endowments, either in the dispositional form of the *habitus*, or in objectified form as material goods.<sup>6</sup>

What is useful in the field concept is its ability to take in a broad range of processes pertaining (in name only) to the production, distribution and reception of cultural goods. Bourdieu’s (1993) phenomenally rich and detailed model considers: 1) the works themselves as situated within a space of possibilities and the historical development of these possibilities; 2) the producers of the cultural products as located within the field, with their own strategies, trajectories and dispositions; 3) the structure of the field itself - its logic and operation and its system of available positions as occupied by artists and agents of legitimation and consecration; 4) an examination of the position of the field of artistic production within the broader field of power; and finally 5) the social conditions giving rise to particular forms of aesthetic perception and an analysis of that perception (as found in the book *Distinction* (1984)).

It is to this extent that Bourdieu’s “genetic structuralism”, when applied to art historical cases, is as good an approach to the totality of socio-art relations as there is. It is clearly a demanding analytical method, transcending the limitations of external and internal analysis that are customary in the field of study (Bourdieu, 1990a). But by encouraging a “diacritical reading” of art (intertextual *in extremis*) a properly relational

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<sup>6</sup> Implicit in Bourdieu’s vision of the development of fields is a theory of modernization that maps the terrain of social formations in relation to how autonomous its constituent fields are (Lash, 1990). The greater the distance between fields (economic and cultural for instance), the greater ability fields have to “refract” outside incursions and the greater potency an immanent form of capital has in that field, all indicating a mature social system. The field is therefore a critical mediating configuration wherein external structures are brought to bear upon and are negotiated by individual and institutional practice. As we shall see, for much of the period under study here, the artistic field struggles to attain this level of autonomisation from the political/economic field.

sociology of art grounded in advanced, multi-level analysis, can be attempted. Moreover, though charged with promoting an over-integrated and, at times, reductionist analysis of art and social space Bourdieu's analytic is a decent starting position, to which nuances, complexities and contingencies may be articulated. So while the thesis often meanders away from a strict Bourdieusian reading in order to focus on Scottish history or to invite other authors who deal more substantively with the eighteenth century, or aspects of governance, for instance (shortcomings in Bourdieu's own work) his principal assumptions nevertheless underpin much of what will said here. I will be treating Bourdieu as a figure who provides key orienting propositions and heuristic tools adequate for a productive cultural analysis, and therefore good to think "with" and "against" (Jenkins, 1992).

Structured in the shape of a "V", the thesis flows from the general to the specific, drawing on secondary material in the first half and primary archive data in the second half. It is organised into seven substantive chapters, five of which focus on the Scottish case. It therefore contributes more to Scottish cultural history than to European or English developments. The comparative dimension is crucial, however, in order to throw light on models of museum development generally, and to signal the importance of shifting levels of analysis from local conditions of production to broader historical trends.

Questions of "space" are raised towards the end of thesis as a means of dealing more substantively with the relationship between galleries, power and cultural authority. Again using Bourdieu, but also cognizant of the work of Lefebvre, the thesis attempts to map elements of refined space according to the tension between regulation and use. I reconstruct Scotland's National Gallery building and its contents as it appeared in 1859 and take a hypothetical walk through the gallery in order to reveal its operation to be based on a set of ideo-logics that served to make professional and bourgeois audiences (as secreted in the educated *habitus*) feel at home, but at the same time to symbolically marginalise the lower classes and the uninformed. Space, in other words, is analysed as a mode of establishing identities, boundaries and subject positions: the gallery is scrutinized for the circulations of codes and texts that spoke of the gallery's history in civic refinement, professional distinction and the need to distanciate the high from the

vulgar.

The account is concluded with a brief discussion of Scotland's position in the European and British contexts and of the status of case studies in the construction of models of museum development. Scotland's unique historical mix of socio-cultural forces - the enlightenment, civil society and romanticism - suggests the need for closer attention to local conditions of production in cultural histories of the national art museum. Historical divergences, however, must be read within certain broad possibilities that delimit the shared ground of modern European museums. A common tension is revealed in the projects both of the nation and the art museum between orthodox representations of the public and the socially layered reality of participation. As a parting thought, consideration is given to the character of the "stranger" as a figurative lens through which the logics of inclusion/exclusion may be focused. If national art museums were a powerful means by which the value of taste could be given cultural authority and respectability, what the figure of the "stranger" does is suggest the boundaries of such spaces of refinement. This relationship between taste, nations and strangers captures the essence of the national art museum's ambivalent historical genesis.

# FROM COURT TO STATE: THE EMERGENCE OF NATIONAL ART MUSEUMS IN CONTINENTAL EUROPE

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## A: Introduction

All art objects bear meaning on their production, display and consumption. As Pomian (1990) indicates, in this, a relation can be posited between the visible (the collection, for instance) and the invisible (the past, but also taste, wealth, distinction and so on). We respond less to the intrinsic attributes of cultural goods, than to the symbolic meanings given to them (DiMaggio, 1987; Veblen, 1967; Bourdieu, 1984). Hence, key elements in any consideration of the character and function of the gallery are the questions - who is the collection for and why? In other words, who sees or takes most meaning from seeing? Which social identities are at stake? What social function has the collection? And how does the gallery space operate to fulfil this function?

This chapter pursues an answer to these questions in the form of a socio-cultural genealogy of the national art museum in Europe. The aim is twofold: firstly, to provide a brief survey of the European art field and the particular position of the national art museum within this field from around the sixteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries. This is really an endeavour to construct a continental model or archetype (mainly of France, Germany, Austria, Spain, Italy and the Netherlands) from which the English and Scottish models are removed. Secondly, I wish to set up some theoretical parameters to this problem of museum formation in relation to ideology and power; in particular, to the interests of cultural elites, forms of state administration and aspects of governance.

To these ends, I have organised the narrative according to three historical types or profiles: 1) the princely gallery of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; 2) the inchoate museum of the eighteenth century; and 3) the relatively “pure” space of the nineteenth century. These are useful historical figurations that help to make the history of the art museum more intelligible and patterned rather than explanatory devices in



themselves. By cutting the project of the museum into distinct but overlapping schemes it becomes possible to reflect on historical contrasts and comparisons and to highlight broad trajectories in arrangements which are often differentiated.

What follows, then, is an attempt to comprehend the art museum's emergence sociologically (a "sociogenesis", if you like), but also politically and culturally, as a socio-cultural artefact itself. I seek to establish why institutions such as the Louvre became visible during the modern period in the form that they did. What, in short, made them pertinent, effective and beneficial? And to whom? Like any problem of genealogy, this initially begs an excursion further into history than one would normally expect of such an apparently modern institution.

## **B: The Classical Precursors**

Reading back through classical and medieval periods to search for decisive precursors to the public art museum yields interesting, if over historicised results. Many commentators have suggested that the "museum idea" should be traced back to antiquity; to the ancient Grecian and Roman treasure spaces of Delphi and Olympia, Hadrian's villa at Tivoli, the "museum" at Alexandria or the Acropolis in third century B.C. Athens, for example (Lee, 1997; Mordaunt-Crook, 1972; Alexander, 1979, Lewis, 1984). After all, it was here that the word *mouseion* was first identified as signifying the home of the muses, the nine daughters of Zeus and progenitors of learning and inspiration. Equally, museum historians have indicated that the amorphous accumulations of *objets d'art* in the medieval period have had formative influence on the modern museum form. The churches and monastic libraries which housed ecclesiastical miscellanies and treasures in the Middle Ages are often claimed as "anticipating" later forms of accumulation and display. The collection of Jean, Duke of Berry, brother of Charles V of France, for example, is cited by Mordaunt-Crook (1972) as an important "secular-based" fourteenth-century collection which in its heterogeneity foresaw the morphology of later collections.

There is a sense in which valuable connections can be made between these various cultural figurations. Indeed, as I shall argue below, history is often a palimpsest and cultural forms are always open to antecedental influences. Yet, reading back in this way

also has its dangers; it can be superficial and selective. Ancient collections of paintings, sculpture and manuscripts were primarily votive offerings to the gods, homages to divine figures or sacred "pavilions for the cities" (Schildt, 1988: 85). And it is interesting to note that none of the muses were dedicated to the visual arts. Medieval collections, on the other hand, were, in function, spaces of the spirit. They formulated anagogic experience in cultural form and operated as spaces of Christian glorification, not as secular buildings for the display of "art". The display of objects, in other words, was not conceived as an act in itself. Indeed, the notion of "art" as we recognise it today was, clearly, inconceivable. As Williams (1976) and others have indicated, before the seventeenth century the idea of art had no specialist connotations and the artist was perceived as but one craftsman among many, congregated in a community and employed in a direct relationship with a patron and his demands.

A more convincing precursor to the art museum is to be found in display arrangements developed from the Renaissance period, in the particular form of the princely gallery. Without delving too deeply into the historical detail relating to the royal gallery as proto-museum, it will nevertheless be instructive to set up a profile of this arrangement in order to chart the subsequent trajectory of particular elements relevant to the national art museum.

### **C: The "Absolute Space of Representation": The Princely Gallery, Absolutism and Court Culture**

According to Seling (1967), the term "gallery" has a history detectable to at least the sixteenth century; hence Shakespeare's quip in Henry V: "For in my gallery thy pictures hang". But greater clarity was given to the gallery form in the early seventeenth century. By 1632 the Zeiller dictionary was already calling a gallery "a corridor where pictures hang" (Seling, 1967: 114) clearly denoting its modern usage. And Bazin quotes an Italian architect who, in 1615, in Vienna wrote:

In this city the gallery is not used so much for the exterior of public places as in France, Spain and elsewhere; for some time, following the Roman example, it has been introduced into the houses of many senators, gentlemen and collectors of antique marbles and bronzes, medallions, bas-reliefs and paintings by the most celebrated and prestigious

masters who have ever lived. (quoted in Bazin, 1967: 129)

The gallery (Italian: *galleria*) developed as a distinct space of representation along with the cabinet, the closet of curiosities which became the building trope of other types of museums.<sup>1</sup> The significance of the long, grand gallery revolved around its use as a sumptuous, luxurious *salon* where works of art served as crucial components of the overall appearance and decor. Renaissance collections like those of Lorenzo the Magnificent (1449-1492) and the Medici family came into their own with the dominance of Florence as an art centre from the fifteenth century. As a feature of the Renaissance palace, galleries were the standard form of display for such collections, and came to constitute a *physical* space solely for the presentation of works of art (its *symbolic* space played an entirely different function as we shall see). Examples included the gallery at Sabionetta and the Uffizi galleries, initially the "offices" of the Palazzo Vecchio but converted into a picture gallery in 1582 by Francesco I (Bazin, 1967).

Historically, the formation of collections was bound up with the waxing and waning of imperial states. The mechanics of rule associated with absolutism relied on the exploitation and conquest of overseas lands. Art was a standard form of booty for absolute rulers and their officials in Europe, who took full advantage of the treasures on offer in subjugated territories. The Hapsburgs in Spain acquired treasures and placed them in their Royal palaces as did Cardinal Richelieu for the Bourbons of France. Slightly later, Jules Cardinal Mazarin, the sagacious French connoisseur accumulated an important collection of art on the back of French military victories and was often bribed with art "provided the quality were good enough" (Taylor, cited in Meyer, 1979: 19).

As imperial power swung away from Italy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries towards the absolutist systems of France, Spain, Prussia and Austria, the gallery

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<sup>1</sup> The cabinet (Italian: *gabinetto* and German: *wunderkammer*), initially represented a personal space in which private possessions were placed for safekeeping. Its meaning changed from the sixteenth century, however, to become a square-shaped room replete with artefacts, natural history specimens, medallions, botanical rarities and sometimes paintings and sculpture. Rubens, for example, kept his own cabinet in the famous apse-shaped saloon containing paintings, busts and medallions. It is this latter mode of visibility which is said to have provided the base morphology for the modern natural history museum (Mordaunt-Crook, 1972; Bazin, 1967; Alexander, 1979; Lewis, 1984).



form underwent certain modifications but retained the function laid down for it during the Renaissance. Indeed, despite the broadening of the gallery idea in general - the co-option of the model by the French lower aristocracy and gentry for their *hôtels*, the consideration that lighting should be lateral, the penchant for hanging pictures against red backgrounds to enhance the painting - its operation as a space of visibility was firmly fixed as *princely* and its physicality as *palatial*. This can be clarified with a discussion of the princely gallery's mode of functioning, its internal arrangements, and, first of all, the system of political rule which gave it meaning.

The transition to a more centralised system of rule that was absolutism paralleled the gradual erosion of the polity of the estate and was fuelled, in part, by the new political environment faced by principalities in their quest for rule. Aspects of political management began to depend much more on the implementation of territory-wide laws, the centralisation of administrative government, modern fiscal policies and the creation of military might in the face of inter-state conflict.<sup>2</sup> Certainly, in France, Spain, Prussia and Austria, such a shift to absolutist structures of governance was crucial to the ability of these increasingly centralised states to compete in the theatres of European power politics. As Poggi writes:

From this perspective, the dynamic causing the shift operated not so much within each state considered in isolation as within the *system* of states. The strengthening of territorial rule and the absorption of smaller and weaker territories into larger and stronger ones - processes that had gone on throughout the historical career of the *Ständestaat* - led to the formation of a relatively small number of mutually independent states, each defining itself as sovereign and engaged with the others in an inherently open-ended, competitive, and risk-laden power struggle. (Poggi, 1978: 60)<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Louis XIV's ordinances and codes of 1665 and 1690 which aimed to co-ordinate all of France's matters of civil and criminal life illustrates this drive to apply uniform measures across whole territories. Old feudal tax systems were less suited for levying big funds for military regimes and regional autonomy was an obstacle to absolutism. A modernisation of fiscal proceedings and greater centralisation in geographical management, communications and bureaucratic administration was a clear policy for regimes such as France, Austria and Prussia. In the latter case, both Frederick William I and Frederick the Great carried out key policies of administrative centralisation in the eighteenth century (Poggi, 1978).

<sup>3</sup> The absolutist system of rule implied a singular rather than a dualistic source of governance as was more apparent under the *Ständisch* or town-based system of feudalism (Poggi, 1978).

Central to these European power plays were the magnificent courts of the absolutist regimes, which intensified the monarch's visibility. As Elias (1983) has demonstrated, court society implied a tightly woven set of social relations founded on the need to display rank and royal splendour in the structure of certain rituals and procedures. In Europe by the seventeenth century, court masques, musical presentations and theatre, as well as court dress, symbolic rituals and other conspicuous shows of luxury all constituted features of an ornate performance of power concerned with exhibiting royal authority to court, kingdom and other principalities. Louis XIII's and XIV's elaborate enactments of royal splendour at Versailles, for instance, are ideal examples of how the court heightened personal and public authority. The ruler stood at the pinnacle of this exalted stage and acted out his life in front of its attendants and officials. In turn, these actions took on the ceremonial significance of state performances. Above all, the culture of the court was always a *display* built on a logic of competition, rivalry and the construction of external demarcations from other principalities.<sup>4</sup> Hence, European courts also vied for the privilege of patronising renowned artists and competition for prize works was rigorous amongst them. Court artists such as Rubens, Bernini, Caravaggio were still treated as artisans, lower middle-class servants (Rubens, the rich son of a high state official is an exception) but in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries began to enjoy a degree of professional and financial stability (Warnke, 1993).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> When the court is termed "public" this often implies a very limited "audience" of court officials and other European dignitaries rather than *tout le monde*. Yet a degree of broader public visibility was requisite especially at moments when displays of power were called for - tournaments, festivals, royal anniversaries and so on (Poggi, 1978). Princely representation, on this count, is less "private" and "cut-off" from general visibility than is sometimes implied, although its power is paraded "before" the people rather than "for" them (Habermas, 1989).

<sup>5</sup> Warnke links the change in status of artists at court with emerging theories of art that gave it special value and proximity to the sphere of princely representation. As he writes: "It was the courts that first evolved a system of bursaries for the training of artists, procedures for procuring works of art and the services of artists, state responsibility for building projects, and the use of visual media for secular propaganda and state representation; and it was the courts that first promoted the subjective and aesthetic appreciation of art" (1993: xiv-xv).



Figure 1: Bernini's bust of Louis XIV, commissioned by the king, c. 1630s

As a style based on ceremonial monumentalism and excessive grandeur Baroque was the ideal artistic vehicle and expression of courtly logic. In effect, Baroque was a means of spectacularly disclosing the power-strivings of the king, of playing out the theatrical appearance of court as an external imposition, as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, (a total work of art) as it were. At Versailles the ostentatious combination of decoration, art, sculpture, painting and landscaped gardens, for instance, fused as the grandiose gesture of court life in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Qualities such as "beautiful", "refined", "elegant" now depended on the authoritarian directives of the king and his courtiers, and artists were trained in state-run academies which secured the aesthetic hegemony of absolutism.<sup>6</sup> All this implied the suppression of individual effort, subjective expression

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<sup>6</sup> The *Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture* began in 1648, and was transformed into an appendage to royal authority later under the king's official of fine arts, Le Brun. The academy made state appointments, ran royal commissions and conferred titles on members as well as socialised and trained artists.

and the instigation of a system of direct patrimonial patronage with precise conventions and demands.

But what about the role and function of the gallery space itself, here? How did it serve to function the same absolutist ends which art appears to have done? How, in other words, did the interior *space of representation* represent the *social space of the prince*? An answer must start with the anatomy of the building itself. Among Elias' findings in his dissection of the physiognomy of court life is the significance accorded to buildings and their spatial arrangements. Dwelling places were ordered according to the rank of the owner: *la maison* for the bourgeois, *l'hôtel* for the noble and *le palais* for the prince or king. Each visibly manifested the traditional boundaries of absolutism in a symbolic representation of rank: "A duke must build his house in such a way as to tell the world: I am a duke and not merely a count" (Elias, 1983: 63) and no other person would dare to build a residence which tried to emulate or surpass that of the king in magnitude or ornamentation. The interior of courtly spaces, similarly, articulated the requirements of conspicuous display and it is here that the princely gallery functioned as a celebration of the magnificence of the sovereign. Such exhibition spaces began as lavish corridors, sometimes reception halls or ceremonial suites, wherein the King or prince impressed himself upon important officials and visitors. The Belvedere of Innocent VIII in Rome was joined by such a momentous corridor to the Vatican, as was the *Grande Gallerie* of the Louvre; the latter connecting the chateau in the city (the Louvre) to the country residence (the Tuileries). Other exhibition spaces began as integral features of private estates, houses or annexes to houses (Bazin, 1967).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> With regard to the physical layout of this space in relation to the court, Elias sets up a description as follows: "The visitor alights from his coach to the outside staircase in front of the main building, passes through a large rectangular hall and from there reaches the large, circular *salon*. On the one side of this, reached from the hall by their own entrance, are the rooms of the *apartement de société*, principally the antechamber and the cloakroom; then comes a *salle de compagnie*, a small, more intimate oval *salon*, a dining room next to which is the buffet, and so on. On the other side of the main *salon* is the *apartement de parade*, including smaller ceremonial *salons* and cabinets, and then, connecting to one *salon*, a large gallery extending far beyond the adjoining wing and separating the main garden from the smaller flower garden. In addition, this ceremonial apartment includes bedrooms of state with all their appurtenances" (Elias, 1983: 52).





Figure 2: Cardinal Valenti-Gonzaga's gallery at Rome, painted by Pannini in the early Eighteenth Century

Although some collections were open to the public before the mid-eighteenth century (usually on payment of a fee or by strict appointment and on restricted days only), such accessibility was secondary. Certainly, any idea that there might be a duty to allow an undifferentiated public access to the collection would have appeared nonsensical. The princely gallery was a viewing space for a limited "public". Visitors, as Hudson affirms, "were admitted as a privilege, not as a right and consequently gratitude and admiration, not criticism was required of them" (1975: 6). The visit reflected this. One was paying homage to the prince and encountering his symbolic presence not merely admiring the mass of artefacts. The visitor (that is, the prince's guest) might have contemplated individual works but his or her apprehending gaze acquired meaning only in relation to the aura of the prince, not from the works of art themselves.

Typical princely collections like those of Philip II of Spain, Cardinal Geronimo Colonna and Cardinal Mazarin were visually ordered according to a principle of quantity and excess - a "spectacle of treasures" - that interiorised the personal world-view of the

prince (Graña, 1971). On the one hand, added potency to the ordering of visual representation accrued as the typographic perceptual field of the Renaissance slowly gave way to the more visually oriented universe of the *ancien regime*. As Lowe (1982) indicates, this placed a greater emphasis on outward appearance, the primacy of sight and representation in space. On the other hand, this field of display was "fundamentally non-reflexive, visual and quantitative" (Lowe, 1982: 13); that is, its organising principle was spectacle. Pictures were arranged floor-to-ceiling in a tapestry-like effect, visually ordering the magnificence of the ruler in a system of superabundance which clearly contrasts with today's techniques of display. As Bazin comments: "if our ancestors were to wander through our museums, with their great expanses of empty wall, they would find them poor and in bad taste" (1967: 129) and he goes on to quote a visitor to Roman *Paolozzo* in 1729 who exclaimed:

The entire decoration of a room consists in covering its four walls, from ceiling for floor, with paintings in such profusion and with so little space between them that in truth, the eye is often fatigued as amused (cited in Bazin, 1967: 129).

Works of art, in fact, were often modified (cut or enlarged) to fit into this general schema without the knowledge or consent of the artist, again clarifying the limited status of the artist before the eighteenth century. Pictures, furthermore, had a decorative rather than expressive or individuated function at this time. Certain subjects were considered more apt for certain rooms than others: landscapes for great chambers, mythological icons for banqueting halls, pastoral scenes for halls and intimate portraits for "withdrawing chambers". Otherwise, paintings were made to order (via a contract) with the "client" having overwhelming control over its materials, subject matter and style. Royal portraits, for instance, often depicted the king and his courtiers in the allegorical style, making the important iconic relationship between the king and divinity. Painting, as already implied, was too functional to be left solely to painters (Baxendall, 1972; Clifford, 1987).

Complementing the spectacle of abundance was a more subtle technique of royal legitimization - the use of complex iconographic programmes that were designed to place the ruler in a system of hierarchical value. Busts or portraits of princes were often placed at the focal point of a glorious heritage represented by other illustrious emperors or

noteworthy figures from history. In the seventeenth century, for instance, the collection of the Hapsburg emperor Rudolf II was systematised so as to centre the ruler in a sonorous pictorial narrative which illustrated the munificent effects of his rule (Duncan and Wallach, 1980). And the Antiquarium of Albrecht V of Bavaria in late sixteenth-century Munich was marked by portraits of renowned emperors of the past whose deeds the prince appropriated as his legacy. Part of the impetus for the arrangement of the princely collection was clearly founded in the desire for a form of immortality. The prince was aspiring to a mixture of everlasting life, glory and fame (Pomian, 1990).

To bring some of this together, then. In a recent paper, Fyfe (1993), drawing on Veblen and Bourdieu speaks of cultural forms and institutions as embodying certain systems of (class) domination termed "modes of distinction". In the case of the princely gallery, the possession of artistic goods was a direct indicator of social standing. Displays of symbolic power in courtly society were moments of "conspicuous consumption" that pointed up the need for "public" recognition and superabundance in the social field. Culture, in this connection, served the ends of absolutist power by staging or actualising it, making it spectacularly manifest. Works of art were expressions of private influence and individual wealth, trophies which indicated possession, social ascendancy and control. In the gallery, the eye of the visitor was socialised within the aura of the prince's cultural authority whose presence was ubiquitous:

Visitors are presented with the viewpoint of the patron. They are likely to encounter signs of the patron's presence even in his or her absence - the very conditions of access, the patrimony of family portraits, the preoccupations, perhaps the obsessions of the collector, the prince's private study and an architecture which is tribute to the patron's authority/authorship. (Fyfe, 1986: 25)

It is in this sense that the pre-modern gallery was an "absolute space of representation" (Bennett, 1995) in which all ways of seeing were reduced to the reproduction of the power of the monarch. Its point of reference (or founding presence) was singular, its function patrimonial and the elements contained within it indivisible. Ideologically, spatially and visually, absolutist displays of art functioned as appendages to royal power which had no need to claim popular representation or generality.

Looking ahead, we may say that the configuration of aesthetic, political and socio-

economic conditions which congealed around the princely model gave it a function that was to be reconfigured or transformed from the second half of the eighteenth century. And yet its continued dominion was, as I shall point out, still felt long beyond the point the social system which bore it had faded.

The main question for now centres on the subsequent historical trajectory of the art museum in Europe. It is pertinent to ask, in other words: how did we get from this personalised display of treasures to the "modern", "secular", "public" institution which we find today? What made the new museum's emergence attractive and compelling? And how did the gallery function to produce and sustain emerging social interests?

### **D: The Emergence of the National Art Museum: Introductory Comments**

"Some historians seem to be unable to recognise continuities and distinctions at the same time." (Panofsky, 1955: 26)

The difficulty in answering these questions lies with the complexity, variety and protracted nature of art museum development in Europe - a convoluted historical genesis which has left its mark on the modern institutional form to this day. The temptation is to envisage the shift from the princely gallery to the national art museum as a tidy disjuncture, usually fixed with the French Revolution, and to set up various points of departure: from private to public, from religious to secular, from restriction to access, from spectacle to education, from monarchical to bourgeois, and so on. Furnished in these terms, what we end up with is two neat profiles with a "menu" of bipolar opposites - aesthetic, temporal, political, cultural, sociological - mainly revolving around the pre-modern/modern schema.

Yet, such a search for straightforward breaks, discrete sets of oppositions or distinct moments of "birth" or "arrival" is misguided. History does not unfold in a series of packaged moments and to characterise the different traditions according to ready-made conceptual spans is to replace classification with caricature. Cultural forms and institutions are always pervaded by configurations of a past time as well as a present time. Features of a modern culture are never totally divested of their original normative arrangements and constitutions. Rather, features are reconfigured or restructured under



new conditions and form mutated combinations. In Williams' sense (1981), aspects which were once dominant are thrown into relief but retain a residual effect, emergent tendencies flower into dominance and so on.<sup>8</sup> In this connection, the princely and the public arrangements are not separated by an iron curtain, but, at certain moments, co-exist: they are not antithetical forms of negation but are composite dispositions which engender in the modern form certain institutional idiosyncrasies.

Like modernity itself, in fact, the museum has been found to be Janus-faced, double-coded, ambivalent. Historically, it has oscillated between contrasting sets of values and exhibited apparently self-contradictory behaviour; functioning as an inward-looking, elitist temple of patrician scholarship but also as an instrument of "populist", democratic pedagogy; providing an experience which is "religious", ritualistic and ceremonial but offering artefacts which have been "scientised" and secularised. Indeed as Nochlin condenses it:

As the shrine of an elitist religion and at the same time a utilitarian instrument of democratic education, the museum may be said to have suffered from schizophrenia from the start. (1971: 646)

All this is a product of the museum's complex history.<sup>9</sup>

In any case, these cautionary provisos and institutional ambiguities have to be held in mind through the following narrative. Yet, if formulated in more *nuanced* terms, the constitution of differences between the pre-modern and modern configurations remains of value. It has to be said that there are significant alterations in the morphology of the art museum from the mid eighteenth century on which need to be identified and unpacked. Though they are often imperceptible inflections in an historical curve, to ignore these changes would be to disavow the fact that the museum underwent variations in condition

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<sup>8</sup> Jameson makes use of these categories as he writes: "Radical breaks between periods do not generally involve complete changes of content, but rather the restructuration of a certain number of elements already given: features that in an earlier period or system were subordinate now become dominant, and features that had been dominant again become secondary" (quoted in Best and Kellner, 1991:186).

<sup>9</sup> On the museum as a contradictory project see Graña (1967), Nochlin (1971), Duncan and Wallach (1980). For a crucial commentary on modernity as an ambivalent undertaking see Berman (1982).

at all, which is clearly erroneous. What follows is an attempt, then, to comprehend these shifts and present a socio-genesis which is sensitive to both continuities and differences: a process-oriented account which recognises alterations, if you like. For it is a matter of indicating evolution but avoiding strong forms of historicism.

Two broad sections have been set aside in order to investigate the dawn of the art museum in Europe: 1) an investigation into eighteenth century developments in Europe's social, political and cultural fields as a period of transition and promise. In particular, I will be flagging advances at the level of ideas in relation to the concept of art and its classification as well as developments in the matrix of institutions, discourses and individuals that make up the fine art field in the second half of the eighteenth century. This will feed into a description of some early "enlightened" conceptions of the art museum itself; 2) A more substantial pursuit of some of the above developments but with particular attention to the early nineteenth century, considered to be the "golden age" of the art museum, including; the growing confidence of bourgeois cultural elites with their distinctive "modes of distinction"; the full maturation of structures of artistic production; and the rising importance of the nation-state as a catalyst to the national art museum. I will bring some of these arguments together in a characterisation of the national art museum as a "relatively pure" space of representation whose existence indicates, by the mid nineteenth century, a realm of aesthetic efficacy that is definitively modern.

## **E: Enlightened Absolutism and the Rise of Civil Society**

Eighteenth-century Europe was fertile ground for the establishment of modern forms of thought, politics and culture. The Enlightenment fostered the ideals of progress, universal human rights and the triumph of reason so central to the configuration of modernity. As Habermas indicates, its aim "was not only the control of natural forces but also the understanding of the world and of the self, moral progress, the justice of institutions and even the happiness of human beings" (1981: 103). It would be well-nigh impossible to do justice to the richness of Enlightenment culture and politics here. As one of the richest periods in European history, critical analysis of the eighteenth century constitutes a burgeoning field of study that must remain relatively untouched here (see Bartholomew,

M., Hall, D. and Lentin, A., 1992 for a broad overview). Equally, the conditions pertaining to each European region are varied, involving different sets of urgencies which imprint at different speeds on different artistic fields. But some broad points are worth making for heuristic analysis.

In my present schema, the eighteenth century can be considered as a period of accelerated social transformation which set in train many of the cultural developments which are part and parcel of our art landscape today. In particular, we begin to see the key accoutrements of art world personnel, discourses and institutions in this period, vital for the empowerment, recruitment and legitimation of artists and their audiences. The gallery, too, starts to shed some of the features it displayed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, taking a more recognisably modern form.

Before addressing the sphere of high art, though, let me sketch the political backdrop to this period of provenance. I have already alluded to the absolutist structures of rule which took hold during the sixteenth to early eighteenth centuries in continental Europe. I argued that this system provided the political *raison d'être* for the princely gallery and its circular form of power. Here, I mentioned Poggi's formulations regarding the centralised princely state and Elias' statements on the court as expressive of this central administration. Following Poggi, I will continue to trace the trajectory of political systems of rule on the continent as they appear in the eighteenth century, "beyond absolutism". I will also explore some ensuing ramifications for the visibility of a "public sphere" where many of the important cultural developments of this period are played out.

According to Poggi (1978), European absolutism was stretched in the latter half of the eighteenth century to accommodate shifting relations between the state and larger society, heralded, for Poggi, in the "enlightened absolutism" of eighteenth century Austria and Prussia.<sup>10</sup> On the one hand, the emergence of a gap between the state and the social

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<sup>10</sup> Both regimes, Prussia under Frederick the Great and Austria under Maria Theresa and Joseph II (1740-90), were ultimately pressed to follow a new set of administrative practices that paid increasing attention to the welfare needs of the population - to the needs of society at large. However, the subject's well-being is not the ultimate end of this system; the end is the military, cultural and economic well-being of the state itself, secured via the effective control of its population.

sphere inhabited by "private individuals" outside the state was a result of increasingly centralised power. As the state became more visible and concrete it also moved "up and away from the larger society to a level of its own, where specifically political personnel and functions were concentrated" (Poggi, 1978: 78). From these lofty heights, the multitudes were treated as objects of rule, with obligations and duties, as taxpayers, potential soldiers and so on. To this extent, they were reduced to a function "other" than the state, unqualified to take an active role in governing themselves and therefore as suitable objects of governance.

On the other hand, such a process helped to crystallise civil society into a self sustaining, autonomous realm of private individuals with its own aims and demands. A fencing off of ordinary social relations from (and against) the traditional imperatives of absolutism had become the principal aim of civil society itself. In the long term, this increasingly dualistic configuration transformed the system of rule by "realising the civil society's demand for an active, decisive role in the political process" (Poggi, 1978: 79).

The prime agency of civil society was the segment of political actors whose power and confidence, based on the possession of capital, blossomed with the capitalist mode of production and the market. The bourgeoisie's emerging social identity as a class (rather than as an estate) placed it in opposition to the old priorities of the absolutist state. Its financial, cultural, intellectual and legal rights, in particular, were felt to be in jeopardy under the absolutist regime. A challenge to absolutism, then, had been set by the bourgeoisie who broke through the limits on absolutist discourse by positing a radical critique of royal privilege and the excesses of courtly life. Such grievances were aired in societies, journals and associations where new forms of thought, assembly and critique arose away from the court. This is what Habermas (1989) has termed the "public sphere".

If civil society was the broad ground on which a new conceptualisation of social space was enacted, a space of moral improvement, increasing inner wordliness and "natural sympathies" (of Locke and the *philosophes*), it was the public sphere which fully articulated this vision.<sup>11</sup> According to Habermas, the bourgeois public sphere was a

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<sup>11</sup> The shift to a more secular universe of thought is crucial here. Seligman notes, for instance, the new terms in which social space was conceived in the eighteenth century: "Not yet fully casting

discursive alliance of reasoned individuals whose principles were common sense, universal morality, secular rationality and public welfare. It was, in effect, a mediating device between the state and civil society "in which the public organises itself as the bearer of public opinion" against "the arcane policies of monarchies" (1989: 137).<sup>12</sup> As a politically charged environment the aim of the public sphere was to foster mechanisms of representation (an elected assembly, for instance) at the heart of the state, in opposition to individual rulers. Much of this world-view was carried out publicly in coffee houses, literary salons, scientific societies, the media and so on:

In this way, certain social groups, predominantly bourgeois, though sometimes mixed with elements from the nobility and the lower clergy - progressively put themselves forward as an audience qualified to criticise the state's own operation. They were seeking, as it were, to complement the 'public sphere' constructed from above with a 'public realm' formed by individual members of the civil society transcending their private concerns, elaborating a 'public opinion' on matters of state and bringing it to bear on the activities of state organs (Poggi, 1978: 82).<sup>13</sup>

## **F: The Eighteenth Century Field of Cultural Production**

The public sphere was fertile ground for the development of many of Europe's modern cultural and intellectual schemes and institutions. Unfettered by the court, it acted as a space of possibilities, a forum for liberatory ideas, providing the conditions for envisaging

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off its moorings in a Godly benevolence, it nevertheless came to be characterised by increasing inner-wordliness, that is to say, by human attributes which themselves had to support a vision of the social good" (1992: 27).

<sup>12</sup> This ability, for Habermas, sprung from a defining feature of modernity, the uncoupling of social spheres - artistic, legal, scientific, economic, moral. Each sphere was left to its own rational development under modernity, freeing up the activities of private individuals to act independently of the monarch or the church.

<sup>13</sup> Poggi makes some useful comments on the continuities between the absolutist regime and the emerging nineteenth-century constitutional state which relates to my earlier comments on reconfiguration. He points to the lack of a "break" with the old regime and the overlap of interests between the bourgeoisie and the absolutist apparatus of rule as long as the latter could be modified to accommodate bourgeois control. The danger from below was a significant deterrent. The bourgeoisie "had to guard against the potential democratic-populist implications of such ideas as popular sovereignty or equality of citizenship" (1978: 85). Some of the mechanisms of traditional rule remained attractive to secure against this. Elias (1983) makes a similar point in his comments on the incorporation of courtly codes (etiquette, for instance) into bourgeois life as the latter undergoes its process of "civilisation".



new ways of thinking, doing and seeing. In effect, the public sphere prised open a gap between itself and absolutist traditions in which the modern tools of art, politics and thought were forged.

As Burgin has written, "The basic configuration of ideas and institutions which circumscribe our view of 'Art' today was first assembled in the eighteenth century" (1986: 149). I would like to sketch out just two sets of components comprising this fine art configuration: firstly, the ideational modernisation of art and related concepts; and secondly, the rise of market patronage, the popularity of more bourgeois art genres and the broadening of the public constituency for art works in Europe.

### i) *Art, Artist, Aesthetics, Genius*

It was the growing autonomy of cultural, intellectual and artistic formations from pre-modern ties which provided the basis for the radical overhaul of the concepts of "genius", "creation", "artist" and the practice of aesthetics. These, in turn, combined to form the discursive conditions for the emerging view of art as somehow special, sacred or pure - a view which helped, in the long run, to conceptualise the need for a building solely for its display. An initial separation at once suggests itself here, though, in relation to the concept of *autonomy*. We must keep in mind the distance between two points which often get (con)fused in writings on art: on the one hand, the actual historical process whereby institutions, individuals and cultural formations achieved a certain distance from archaic religious and royal commands (a process which rested in reality on the reinscription of art into a system of commodity relations); and on the other hand, the doctrine of aesthetic autonomy as it was espoused in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century discourse on art, positing a free-floating, self-determining object of beauty. At a certain level the two are related. Indeed one of the difficulties in separating them rests with the tendency for the *ideology of the aesthetic* to snatch away *historical autonomy* to make it something else, something pure or absolute. But there is real value in remaining cognizant of the differences between institutional and ideological autonomy. The separation promotes methodological clarity and a critical stance on claims to art's *absolute* autonomy - to art as beyond social analysis (Bowler, 1994).

Taking the protean idea of "art" first. Many scholars have pointed to the eighteenth century as the period when art began to take on its specialised meaning. Batteux's *Les beaux arts réduits a un même* of 1747 was one of the first texts to impose a distinction between "fine arts" (poetry, painting, architecture, oratory, sculpture, music, dance) from the "liberal" or "mechanical" arts - a separation that still has currency today. In accordance with changes in capitalist commodity production generally, the underlying separation of artist and artisan confined the latter to the sphere of craft, industry or technology (Williams, 1976). "Art", on the other hand, generated a different set of connotations related to the absence of low or vulgar spheres of human practice, to the higher orders of experience and contemplation which congealed around the idea of human (rather than divine) "creation". Above all, art was marked off as a specialised sphere with its own internal laws and forms. And nowhere was this approach more fully expressed than in that body of writing which gave itself the name "aesthetics".

Baumgarten's term "aesthetics" referred to the discipline dealing with questions of beauty and taste, which gained sway in Europe from the 1770s. The fundamental idea of modern aesthetics revolved around the work of art as an "organic totality", and its task was to lay out both the autonomy of the beautiful and the position of the "genius artist" in the creative process, as the irreducible product of *natural* powers. I stress natural over supernatural because the shift away from the conception of genius as referring to a non-human or divinely-inspired spirit is exactly the shift from a pre-modern to a modern conception of art and social order. For as Mason (1993) suggests, the idea of "genius" is a secularisation of the divine creator of the Christian world-view.<sup>14</sup>

Aesthetic writing from Winckelmann, Hume and Diderot to Kant, Schiller and Reynolds mirrored this venture into the modern world with its attendant push towards rationality and cultural autonomisation. But it also played a role in defining art as

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<sup>14</sup> Mason explains: "The modern concept of genius is...one aspect of that overall change in which the balance between god's bounty and human achievement shifted decisively toward the latter. Just as political rule came to be justified not by divine right or historical precedent but rather in terms of (more or less) democratic consent, or as, later, May Day ceased to be a celebration of the earth's fertility and became an assertion of the power of labour, so genius became a wholly human phenomenon, independently productive and deriving its value from itself" (Mason, 1993: 210).

conceptually opposite to other forms of being. On the one hand, the very ability of such figures to write in bourgeois public spheres away from the court was testament to institutional autonomy and the rise of new cultural markets in literature. The growth of periodical literature, including the kind of aesthetic commentary Diderot indulged in, gave critics space to pit a universe of reason against the one-dimensional value system of aristocratic opinion. In addition, coteries of groups and select societies given to discussing matters of art and high culture flourished in the coffee houses and inns of Europe. On the other hand, aesthetics spoke of its object in terms of criteria internal to itself and independent of extraneous laws or commands, as a mode of being which was entirely self-regulating and self-determining, existing beyond the material and the everyday.

For the high-priest of this doctrine of autonomy, Kant, art was that which was free, "devoid of all interest", a product of creative genius, itself "the exemplary originality of a subject's natural endowment in the *free* use of his cognitive powers" (cited in Mattick, 1993: 172, 174). Its antithesis was "pleasure", the "bodily", and anything which serviced a lower form of enjoyment. A new kind of human subject was called for to contemplate art's beauty - the disinterested, virtuous and sensitive individual, whose model was the cultivated bourgeois, having appropriated the civilised codes of the aristocracy - the two cultures which Kant himself straddled (Eagleton, 1990). Reception of the "pure" implied a "pure knowing subject", who was "freed from subjectivity and its impure desires." (cited in Bourdieu, 1984: 487)

## ii) *The Market, Patronage and "Bourgeois" Art Styles*

Yet, art's rise to autonomous status in reality involved the gradual replacement of pre-modern forms of patrimonial patronage with production for the more diffuse market. This proved to be a highly significant force in breaking down archaic structures of art production and traditional modes of taste as well as inscribing greater numbers of consumers in the art field. A rapidly growing cultural matrix of professional agents, critics, dealers, connoisseurs and publishers developed to support this system. By the end of the eighteenth century in most European countries, the artist was enmeshed in a



complex set of socio-economic relations and cultural markets detached from the court, whose trajectory was taking it further into the bourgeois cultural modernity of the nineteenth-century.

Institutional autonomy was a prize bought at the price of incorporating art into the market. Although there is historical overlap between "patronal" and "market" relations (Williams, 1976), they can be distinguished in practice in that "production for the market involves the conception of the work of art as a commodity, and of the artist, however else he may define himself, as a particular kind of commodity producer" (1976: 44). Turning art into an object of exchange was a feat born of the rise of the money economy and the displacement of royalty and nobility in the arts by bourgeois imperatives. The court as a cultural centre was slowly being undermined and replaced by new patrons and institutions for artistic support in the later eighteenth century. In music, theatre, literature and painting the dissolution of courtly art was particularly evident. In France, for instance, the courtly magnificence of Louis XIV was discontinued under Louis XV, as the *ancien regime* waned. Rather, the bourgeoisie gradually took possession of the tools of culture, and reproduced its taste along the way. As Hauser has written: "it not only wrote the books it also read them, it not only painted the pictures, it also bought them ...now it is the cultured class *par excellence* and becomes the real upholder of culture" (1962: 9).

Such a situation was already apparent in the Netherlands by the seventeenth century (closely followed by England in the eighteenth). Here, the Protestant middle class attained economic dominance comparatively early, as the Dutch republic expanded overseas, innovated internally and produced the most advanced mercantile complex in Europe (Westermann, 1996). The Dutch art market was, accordingly, a fierce but highly specialised system controlled by *burghers* and commercial groups, distributed through fairs and auctions and fueled by private speculation (Hoetink, 1982). At the top of the patronage hierarchy were the Stadhoulders in The Hague, commissioning specific artists for portraits or history paintings. More routinely, artists operated in cities with open markets such as Haarlem, Antwerp, Utrecht and Amsterdam. Here, works in the style of genre, portraiture or landscape could be distributed to middle-class buyers through

dealers, book and picture shops. This gave artists such as Rembrandt, Hals and Vermeer greater room to experiment or practice in a variety of styles (Pevsner, 1970). However, most art fetched low prices (around twenty guilders per picture) and the constant struggle to balance artistic freedom with financial security was made all the more difficult with volatile fashions and fluctuating trade (Westermann, 1996).

The Dutch case is clearly peculiar and irreducible merely to class or religion, not least because the segregations between “popular” and “bourgeois” culture may not have been so marked as elsewhere (Schama, 1991). However, we may recognise some homologies between social conditions extant in this case during the seventeenth century and those in other parts of Europe a century later (particularly Scotland as will be argued later). Moreover, similarities in the stylistic modes that painters tended to work within in both cases suggest a *certain affinity* between commercial aggrandizement (with an implied social agency) and art. For one of the crucial inner features of the works of Hals, Vermeer, Ostade and Steen, as well as Greuze and Chardin in France, was the representation of a more middle-class sphere of taste. Vermeer, for instance, painted realistic portraits of women, localised/particularised landscapes and vernacular scenes from folk-life which paralleled Dutch resistance to absolutism.



Figure 3: Johannes Vermeer, *Woman with Water Jug*, c. 1662



And Greuze, while not wholly abandoned by the aristocracy, drew on the everyday dramas, sentimentalised village idylls and scenes of parental tenderness that were bourgeois in charm and market appeal. Unlike the heavy ceremonials of classical baroque, with its singular function of glorification, bourgeois art was relatively accessible, naturalistic, subjective and expressed a kind of intimacy and institutional freedom.



Figure 4: Jean Baptiste Greuze, *The Village Bride*, exhibited at the French salon in 1761

The movement away from baroque is evident, in France, by the *early* eighteenth century, in the lighter and more delicate pictures of Watteau and Boucher - both exponents of the intimate and playful rococo. Moreover, as a period of transition, there are, of course, contradictory stylistic impulses in the eighteenth century: tradition and liberation, formalism and improvisation, ornamentation and subjectivity. The domination of the *Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture*, with its hierarchy of members and genres (history painting at the pinnacle, then portraiture, landscape and genre), and closely observed aesthetic canons, continued in the eighteenth century. The king still had a virtual monopoly on large scale commissions and special permission was required from him if artists were to paint for anyone else. But by mid century, many of these restrictions were relaxed as a private commercial market vied for attention alongside the official one. Crow (1985), for instance, points to the rise of the *salon* as an alternative outlet for artistic commentary, criticism and painting. This helped to move art beyond the narrow confines of an original cultural elite and opened it up to the vicissitudes of individual,

often middle class, patrons. As the century wore on, many of these patterns accelerated, impelling Hauser to suggest that by its close, "the only important art in Europe is bourgeois":

It is possible to differentiate between a progressive and a conservative trend within the middle class, but a living art expressing aristocratic ideals and serving court purposes no longer exists. In the whole history of art and culture, the transfer of leadership from one social class to another has seldom taken place with such absolute exclusiveness as here, where the aristocracy is completely displaced by the middle class and the change in taste, which puts expression in the place of decoration, could not possibly be any clearer. (Hauser, 1962: 2)

By the late eighteenth century, landscapes and genre scenes, in particular, were growing in popularity amongst middle class collectors and dealers,<sup>15</sup> as well as dispersed to a broad constituency of non-collectors via engravings, books, tourist memorabilia and so on. The fashion for Dutch and Flemish domestic scenes - depictions of the life of everyday folk - received much derision from the more aristocratic connoisseurs of Europe who considered them immoral and vulgar, as bearing the marks of the commercial system which gave rise to them. But even Diderot praised Greuze's genre pictures and encouraged artists irritated by the traditional critics to show in the market-led *salons*. And by the end of the century grand taste had given away to the "less noble" style of the *petits goûts* - the little pictures. Portraits, too, once only afforded by the high elites, were now commissioned by those of the middling ranks to satisfy their own vanities - a common-place, almost plebeian genre for domestic distinction.

iii) *Dealers, Critics and the Audience*

In contrast to the calculation of art's value in pre-modernity, resting on labour or materials (the use of ultramarine blue or gold leaf in the Renaissance, for instance), the commodified art object has no value in the traditional sense. Its attraction from the eighteenth century was tied up with more abstract norms - the genius of the artist, his creative abilities, the mysteries of subjective expression, the stroke of the brush, or the

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<sup>15</sup> Numbers of which, in France, according to Mattick (1993), increased from around one hundred and fifty during the period 1700-1720 to five hundred during the period 1750-1790.

purity of the hand. Art's prestige value was something based on the buyer's own desire and the adherence to norms which were believed to reside outside of economic criteria; norms worked up by the new agents of art, the dealers, critics and connoisseurs.

The dealer's task has been to integrate the artist into the art-economic complex, to introduce the work to a broader public of critics, buyers and collectors and to translate aesthetic into economic value (Becker, 1982). But the dealer also provided a buffer between the artist and the market, to obscure the "vulgar" machinations of the market from the creative process. This was an important factor in keeping art "pure", or relatively unsullied from "lower" orders of social expression. Critics, on the other hand, whose profession emerged with print capitalism relied on their personal judgement to report on individual artists and their styles. Like the journalism of the public sphere, itself, aesthetic commentary did not report "news" but was now committed to opinion. This was important precisely because the critic could make or break reputations.<sup>16</sup>

All this implied a reorientation of the art-audience. The arts were no longer the natural appurtenance of the aristocracy - the preoccupation of small elites - but, like leisure and culture in general, a product for bourgeois apparel. The *salon* exhibitions of France, for instance, fully secular and central to the life of the city from 1737, helped break down limits on cultural consumption by bringing together a "broad mix of classes and social types, many of whom were unused to sharing the same leisure-time diversions" (Crow, 1985: 1). The journal or newspaper review was aimed not at an hereditary elite but a *general* public. In music, the middle classes were the chief consumers in the late eighteenth century - a constituency of anonymous concert goers with wider tastes, rather than patrons of aristocratic intentions with strict commands and preferences (Lang, 1973). And the novel, perhaps the most popular genre of all, was widely consumed, especially by middle class women by the late eighteenth century (McKendrick, Brewer

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<sup>16</sup> The review, for instance, was part of the market system whereby art's exchange value could be improved, where artists could get their works known and noticed by the right collectors and dealers (Burgin, 1986). An additional change of focus is evident in the role of private merchants, pushing classical norms of taste below questions of attribution and authenticity. But classical norms are not totally displaced and gain strength away from the market in the works of aristocratic connoisseurs and art historians.



and Plumb, 1982).

### **G: The Inchoate Art Museum in the Age of Enlightenment**

From the above it is clear that the eighteenth century was a crucial watershed for Europe's fields of cultural production. Although subject to different local conditions, most cities and nations were accumulating the necessary accoutrements of high culture - complex mechanisms of production, reward and support systems for artists, instruments of distribution away from the court, specialised personnel involved in a chain of tasks and a developed and informed audience for art. But as part of this field, we must now shift focus back to the art museum and ask how best to characterise its development in this century. Can similar "enlightened" tendencies, in other words, be detected in the art museum?

The difficulty in pinning down the eighteenth century to a neat stage in the art museum's development rests with the fact that it is a period of (often dramatic) transition that promises so much but falls short of delivering the formation in its pure form *en masse*. Certainly, this is not the classic century of the national art museum in Europe. The "golden age" is the nineteenth century. Indeed, many of Europe's emerging art museums continued to function as absolute spaces of glorification. Nevertheless, what the eighteenth century did achieve was the gradual erosion of the single-function princely model and the implantation of seeds of development which later flowered into the more complex space of the national art museum. In particular, the eighteenth century laid down three "museological modalities": 1) certain ideational preconditions for the museum's foundation; 2) the provision of early ideal types and embryonic schemes that were fully realised in the next century; 3) the constitution of a wider public for art museums distanced from the traditions and exclusions of courtly life.

The internal reconfiguration of absolutism made it possible for the first time to think of the art museum as a non-private, or general space with rational, educative or national ends. The demands of intellectuals for a more enlightened and open institution mirrored their attack on royal privilege in general. In response, rulers felt it necessary to pay heed to a greater population and exercise a degree of representative generality. As

already mentioned, "enlightened absolutism" was the administrative characteristic of this system. The modern continental absolutist state adhered in extended ways to population needs, inner resources and the "subject's well-being" (Poggi, 1978). Accordingly, monarchs gradually lifted the restrictions placed on royal collections from the mid-eighteenth century. It is of no surprise to note that Austria, the enlightened absolutist state *par excellence* was one of the first regimes to turn its royal gallery into a nominally "public" art gallery. The Schloss Belvedere in Vienna was opened around 1784 under the directives of Joseph II.

Similar principles were evident in other royal collections which, at different points in the eighteenth century, were made more accessible to broader sections of the population. In Italy, the Uffizi was donated to the "people" by the last princess of the Medici family in 1743. In the late eighteenth century the Grand Duke Leopold I of Tuscany ordered the modernisation of the Uffizi and by 1782 guide books were available for visitors' use.



Figure 5: The first Gallery at the Uffizi in Florence, painted in the early Nineteenth Century

Other Popes, Cardinals and princes in Rome and Naples loosened the restrictions on access to their collections, exhibiting a growing consciousness of their "public" representation. The neoclassical Pio-Clementino, for instance, was opened in 1773 by Pope Clement XIV and contained part of the Vatican collection. In Germany (Prussia,

was the other exemplar of enlightened absolutism) collections in Munich, Kassel, Dresden and Düsseldorf were opened from mid-century, often as strictly municipal rather than "state" collections. In 1756 a building was erected by Johan Wilhelm in Düsseldorf for the sole purpose of exhibiting paintings; and Goethe visited the Elector's gallery at Dresden in 1768.

In France, access to Versailles and the treasures of Louis XIV and XV was only possible, to those inclined, on considerations of attire - although a plumed hat and sword could be hired from the caretaker. Under Louis XV Versailles became less excessively ornamented and large-scale classical and Baroque paintings were no longer given their customary visibility. In fact, according to Bazin (1967), they were loaned as decorative works to private individuals or hidden away in store. This inaccessibility was met with disapproval from artists and public alike. Official pressure yielded a concessionary exhibition of one hundred and ten paintings (old masters of various schools) at the Palais du Luxembourg in 1750, open for six months on two days a week, free of charge.

Central to this period of museum transition were the ideational principles used to characterise the functioning of such spaces and their objects. The placing of royal collections into public or semi-public contexts involved a reconceptualisation of the space of representation as well as the art works inside. The onus shifted gradually away from organising enclosed spaces for private pleasure or personal glorification towards an organisation based on an acceptance of the narratives of (scientific) progress, civil refinement and moral betterment. These were the idioms of the intelligentsia and its public sphere.

The interest in the relics of human achievement, of rare and culturally resonant objects was a form of modern consciousness based on the rise of a sense of history and modern rationality. As Preziosi states it: "One of the spaces of memory par excellence in the West since the eighteenth century, the museum is one of our premier theoretical machineries, and in many ways the very emblem of desires set into play by the Enlightenment" (1994: 141). What was distinctive about Enlightenment thought was the adherence to a more secular and inner-worldly universe of belief which stressed system, order and the application of rational principles of classification to what previously had

eschewed taxonomy. The binomial method of classifying plants and animals by genus and species introduced by Linnaeus and Buffon was matched by the classification of art according to school and chronology.<sup>17</sup> It was Winckelmann's *History of Ancient Art*, published in 1764, which did most to forward this mode of taxonomy. Now, narratives of progress, both in relation to civilisation in its broadest sense and to national art schools helped to recodify the relics of former human achievement.

In Vienna before 1784, for instance, the Austrian royal collection was a limited and disordered hotch-potch of paintings based on the decorative prerequisites of Baroque. Like the standard princely set-up it was the general appearance and format, not the quality which determined the appearance and function of the display space (Bazin, 1967). From 1778, the "enlightened" art connoisseur Christian von Mechel was appointed to re-order the royal collection using rational forms of taxonomy that grouped works according to linear chronology and by school (and hence less according to the single world-view of the monarch). Many of the sumptuous frames which adorned the pictures under the original scheme were replaced with simpler, more prosaic, neoclassical frames.

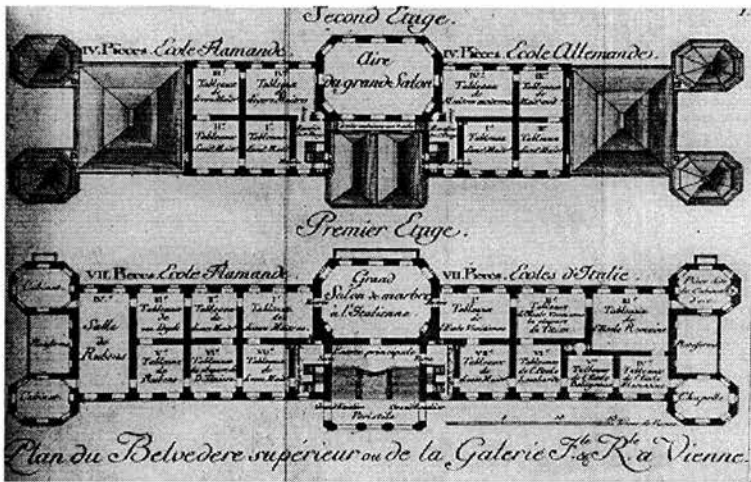


Figure 6: Christian von Mechel's plan of the *Galerie Impériale et Royale de Vienne*, 1784

<sup>17</sup> According to Foucault (1970), the organising principle of science in the "modern episteme" is based on the flow of time. In geology and biology, for instance, organic life is organised temporally, according to transitions and evolutions; and it is the inner momentum of organic life which is said to explain this. An interesting parallel is suggested, here, by Bennett (1995) between this conception and that of art history with its conception of art as a formal, almost organic entity with parallel flows through time.

The pedagogic utility of the overall scheme was expressed in the catalogue (itself a novelty), where Mechel claimed that a walk through the gallery was to be methodical and instructive:

...so that one learns at a brief glance infinitely more than one could if the same paintings were hung without regard to the period which had made them...It must interest artists and amateurs the world over to know there actually exists a repository where the history of art is made visible. (cited in Bazin, 1967: 159)<sup>18</sup>

Even earlier than this, the pictures at Düsseldorf had been arranged in a system of "master and school" by 1756, although paintings were still hung floor-to-ceiling. And many of Vasari's principles of art history were employed in 1770 by Luigi Lanzi for the Uffizi cabinet, using a "grid" to classify European art. Whatever the chronological profile of this system, what is clear is that the rational approach marked an important direction in the order of art works as well as the role of intellectuals in directing the apparatuses of art.<sup>19</sup>

Support for the opening of the royal collection in France, for instance, came from the *philosophes*. In fact Diderot had an even more grandiose scheme in mind. In volume IX of the *Encyclopaedia*, 1765, he outlined the foundation of a *Musée Central des Artes et des Sciences* - a cultural centre for learned activities housed in the Louvre. This was to be based on the *museion* of Alexander the Great and would fulfil the historicist and neoclassical tenets of the Enlightenment. It would hold learned societies, scholarly

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<sup>18</sup> The importance of art history as a classificatory discipline to the museum cannot be over-stated here. As Duncan and Wallach assert: "Without the museum, the discipline of art history, as it has evolved over the last two hundred years, would be inconceivable. Viewed historically, art history appears as a necessary and inevitable component of the public museum" (1980: 456). Duncan and Wallach go on to indicate, rightly, that art history - a product of the eighteenth century - was one way in which the middle class rationalised the experience of art, using it ideologically to secure a position of power/knowledge.

<sup>19</sup> The intellectual pressure put on the kings of Prussia in the late eighteenth century by Aloys Hirt, historian of ancient architecture and Professor of Fine Art in Berlin, is testament to this emerging confidence. The king ought to establish a museum "for public instruction and the noblest enjoyment" opined Hirt; "Genuine art can only thrive, where one has patterns, and they ought to be arranged in beautiful order, and [be] easily and daily accessible to all". He continued, "it is below the dignity of an ancient monument to be displayed as an ornament" (cited in Seling, 1967: 113, 112). Hirt was eventually given charge of a new scheme for an art museum in Berlin but nothing came of this.



collections and become a training ground for creative artists.<sup>20</sup> It would also become a monument to French nationhood, at this point still embodied in the king, augment the glory of the nation and impress foreign dignitaries.<sup>21</sup> The plan, though officially submitted in 1768, was unsuccessful. But a decade later, under Louis XVI, progressive moves were made which heralded a more modern approach to museum function and display in France.



Figure 7: *Project for the Arrangement of the Grand Gallery of the Louvre*, Hubert Robert, 1780s

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<sup>20</sup> Part of the aim here would be to appease voices which feared for the decline of French painting. Such voices blamed the failure on an absence of contact with the old masters which were hidden at Versailles.

<sup>21</sup> This was the enlightened opinion of Lafont de Saint-Yenne, who, in a pamphlet of 1747, called for the Louvre to be restored into a royal art gallery. Such a scheme perhaps also expressed the social reformist impulses of the physiocrats (Mirabeau, for instance), providing a space of civilisation and etiquette, where the "popular classes" could be "educated" - a view which, in the next century was to profoundly shape the "statist" direction of the national art museum.

Count d'Angiviller's appointment as *Directeur General des Batiments* was crucial to a modern fine arts policy and ended in the supplementation and re-organisation of the royal collection as well as preparations for the transformation of the *Grande Gallerie* of the Louvre into a royal exhibition space. Under this proposed scheme (which looks all the more prescient in retrospect) the gallery was to be a source of national pride - a demonstration of the magnificence of Louis XVI. Official committees discussed the most appropriate lighting methods and the paintings were prepared for hanging. Delays dogged the plans, however, and the scheme was overtaken by the Revolution. One can only speculate as to how d'Angiviller's scheme would have unfolded, but Mordaunt-Crook's guess may be instructive:

The royal collection in Paris might eventually have become a museum, like the royal collection in Vienna, and d'Angiviller playing the part of Christian von Mechel. The Louvre might have become as public as the Belvedere. But, like the Belvedere, it would still have been a royal collection. It required the Revolution to turn the idea of a museum into one of the basic institutions of the modern state. (Mordaunt-Crook, 1972: 34)

In fact, we must be careful not to mistake the eighteenth century art museum for the fully formed public, national institution of the nineteenth century. All of the requisite socio-historical forces were yet to accumulate into the recipe which delivered the institution in its fullest form. The state, for instance, was yet to play its formative role in the eighteenth century; the nation was yet to be brought into line with the state; culture was yet to be subsumed under its socio-political remit. To this extent, museums in the eighteenth century were not usually owned by the state on behalf of the people as a corollary to citizenship, governance and democracy. Visitors were subjects, not citizens and power was represented "before" them rather than "for" them. Hence, in many cases, eighteenth century art museums were still royal museums, housed in royal buildings, often playing the role of royal glorification, a legacy of the princely gallery and "juridico-discursive" power (Bennett, 1995). And most significantly, *formal* limits on access were an abiding feature of these collections, remaining specialised, esoteric or cut off from the mass of the public. The Vatican museum, for instance, was not open to the public and the same is true of a host of other formations. The Belvedere in Vienna was only partially open to visitors on three days of the week and then only to those "with clean shoes". In Paris,

pictures in the Luxembourg gallery were arranged according to a system of "contrast and comparison" that assumed an ideal audience of *cognoscenti* and amateurs. There were no labels and visitors were more or less instructed to guess authorship (Bazin, 1967; McLellan, 1984). Finally, catalogues were clearly written with the scholar, not the public, in mind (Hudson, 1987).

Of course such limits were also persistent features of the bourgeois public sphere and its cultural enclaves, even in the nineteenth century. Indeed Habermas' idealisation of the public sphere, in general, glosses what are significant structural forms of exclusion of certain social types and discourses. Rules on dirty footwear were also rules marginalising workers and the sharp distinction of private from public spheres provided the basis for enjoining women in the former. As a *bourgeois* public sphere, in other words, it was restricted historically and socially, acting as a vehicle for middle class distanciation and distinction; a means whereby a struggle against absolutism was effected, but also where bourgeois norms were made, reproduced and imposed on the social edifice. I shall return to these issues, and how the aesthetic is implicated in them, in the next section. But what made the eighteenth century different in this respect was the lack of any official rhetorics of public access - statist definitions of citizenship, government edicts on the benefits of culture for the popular classes or wider patterns of education and commodity consumption. These were values which suffused the national art museum only in the nineteenth century.

Having flagged these qualifications, though, we should not ignore what are significant signs of cultural modernity in the eighteenth century: developments in the matrix of fine art, generally, and the gradual eclipse of the princely model as the dominant space of representation. Despite the lack of a fully materialised art museum, the shape of a recognisably modern institution begins to form in this period. In particular, the inchoate art museum was more open, specialised and rationalised than any of its predecessors. Employing the newly radicalised space of the public sphere, intellectuals delivered the kinds of epistemological supports and enlightened schemes (ideal types) which anticipated the form and function of nineteenth century museums. And a space had opened up wherein the bourgeois class could pour their visions of the museum as a

sphere of public instruction and governance, as they themselves took over the reins of power. All this bespoke broad historical changes in the fabric of European society and polity; changes which were to proceed apace in the nineteenth century.

## **H: The Emergence of the National Art Museum in the Nineteenth Century: The Golden Age**

We arrive in the early nineteenth century, then, at the point where all the crucial political, artistic and social conditions configure to foster the national art museum. Up to now the recipe has been lacking some crucial ingredients. But by the first two or three decades of the nineteenth century, everything is in place and it is rare to find a major European capital which lacks such an institution. Despite local idiosyncrasies in museum morphology, in general, as Duncan observes, "by 1825, almost every Western capital, monarchical or republican, had one" (1995: 32).

Perhaps it is specious to posit any separation between the eighteenth and the early nineteenth century. Centuries, after all, are linguistic and cultural constructs, not iron curtains. But there are genuine reasons for doing so. For it is the early part of the nineteenth century which really witnessed the flowering of many of the tendencies which were only planted in the previous century. It is the early nineteenth century which gave clarity and concrete form to the museum project as something taken up *in general* across the European continent. It is the early nineteenth century which saw the mobilisation of the nation-state as the guardian of the museum idea and its crystallisation into something recognisable to us today. It is the early nineteenth century, in short, where nation, state, bourgeoisie and fine art met in their modern forms to deliver an institution in all of its self-contradictory modernity.

I have included the Louvre, founded in 1792, in the nineteenth century section because this is where I feel it belongs. Everything that museum scholars have valued in the birth of the museum has come to be symbolised in concentrated form in the Louvre: from social class shifts to the decline of the absolutist academy; from modern internal layout to state ideology. In effect, the Louvre has come to take on meta-museological meaning; it is the *sine qua non* of the art museum, the paradigm model and its influence as an archetype on other European cases cannot be overstated. "Containing the finest



collection of Old Master paintings and antique sculpture ever assembled under one roof" says McLellan, "the Louvre, founded in the final years of the Enlightenment, became the model for all state art museums subsequently established" (McLellan, 1994: i). Indeed, the very notion of a *national* gallery, ordered by art historical principles is a product of the French Revolution, as is the notion that all citizens should have access to such museums. The Louvre's early modernity, and particularly the role of the French state is something remarkable. But it really represents the first of a wave of museum founding in Europe, mostly of the nineteenth century. In this sense it is better placed, analytically, in the nineteenth century.

This final section, then, is an attempt to make sense of the last pieces of the puzzle, in particular the pro-activity of the nation-state and the concretisation of bourgeois "modes of distinction" (Fyfe, 1993). Typical of the ambiguities of the modern museum project, though, nineteenth century conditions of formation pull in opposite directions. While the state constitutes the institution as a fully "democratic", "free" and "open" realm of national glory, as extolling the values of citizenship, civic improvement and moral refinement, the art museum, as an essentially *bourgeois* institution, remains an exclusionary and limited enclave. The first part of this section deals with the former *public* component of museum formation as it is elevated by the nation-state. Here it will be necessary to sketch some co-ordinates of the European state system, the development of nationalism and how the art museum intersected with these movements. I will also point to the ideological role of the museum as an instrument of incorporation, polity control and governance. The second part targets the art museum as a *private* realm of "distinction" and connoisseurship for new cultural elites, marking them off from other social groups. Using the work of Bourdieu, in particular, I will suggest that rhetorics of democratic access masked one of the main functions of art museums - to provide high art with an enclave that was pure and which distanced bourgeois elites from others.

## **I: Museums and State Formation**

It is an often overlooked point that national museums are "national" because of the enterprise of a particular nation, usually in tandem with the relevant state unit. Yet, the



relationship between the two is central to an explanation as to why the art museum "took off" when it did. As Pointon (1994) has suggested, the institution of the art museum offers the cultural historian an attractive exemplar of the operation of state ideology. For sure, the aggrandisement of European state and national power in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was coterminous with the rise of the modern national art museum. Indeed, the state and the museum mutually circulated their effects in this period. The museum indexed the urgencies and interests of the nation-state, but it also mobilised these interests, providing a powerful cultural base where official ideologies were made and remade. I will return to this point later. But first, a note on definitions and some background material on the modern constitutional state in Europe is needed here. What made the nineteenth century state different to earlier formations, previously discussed?

Clearly, there are a variety of geopolitical forms in Europe, with multiple temporal trajectories and representative figures. Furthermore, the process of state formation in Europe, as already implied, was exactly that, a process of long term proportions, neither static nor complete. There is overlap, in other words, between the forms of rule discussed above and below. A useful attempt at defining the modern state, however, is provided by Tilly (1975) who targets four features:

(1) it is differentiated from other organisations operating in the same territory; (2) it is autonomous; (3) it is centralised; and (4) its divisions are formally co-ordinated with one another. (quoted in Poggi, 1990: 19)

Poggi takes up this definition for his own preliminary characterisation of the modern state as it appears in the nineteenth century. In this formulation, the state finds its systematic shape after the French Revolution. It is an organisation where political power is vested in and exercised through a set of specially formed arrangements with its own body of rules, resources, and represents a distinctive and unified set of interests and purposes. Its functions are primarily political, it controls a population within a defined territory, using force, if necessary, and exercises sovereignty over this territory. No other organisation can challenge that control. The state is unitary in the sense that all laws and edicts originate from it and all bodies who exercise power must derive their authority from it. At the same time, states exist in a configuration with other polities with their own

autonomy, forms of centralisation, sovereignty and so on, forming what Harris has called a "European state system" (1988: 273). Finally, all the above features are modern, in that they are "not found in any large-scale political entities other than those which began to develop in the early-modern phase of European history" (Poggi, 1990: 25).<sup>22</sup>

The modernity of the nineteenth century state revolved around its ability to routinely order social life via a "thoroughly institutionalised system of political power" (Poggi, 1990: 33). As Weber indicated, its unity and impetus was given as an harmonic to capitalist modernisation: modern capitalism evolved "in alliance with the emergent power of the modern state" (cited in Poggi, *ibid.*: 47). Here, (feudal) barriers to economic and social progress were targeted by emergent bourgeois elites for destruction, to be replaced by centralised, bureaucratic, capitalist formations with designs for expansion. France, England, Spain, Sweden, Portugal and Holland, the "'historic' nation-states" were early models, but the process of state expansion spread outwards to the German-speaking states, Italy, the Balkans, Scandinavia, and so on (Nairn, 1974). By the early nineteenth century, the "European state system", consisting of both archaic and modern powers had evolved, based on a heightened sense of conflict for internal sovereignty, and ordered by principles of law (not individuals), moral (not arbitrary) rule, rational/depersonalised (not impulsive) power, and principles of "justice" (not divine right).

All this implied security for the "reasoning public" and its claims to opinion, freedom and political rights. The eighteenth-century bourgeois public sphere now had a place at the very heart of the nineteenth century constitutional system - constructed in such a way as to actively require public debate and open confrontation. In this respect, a close relationship now attended between civil society and the specialised state, as those

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<sup>22</sup> Poggi explains: "In previous large-scale political entities, political power was institutionalised in a different manner, and mostly to a lesser extent. Those entities mainly expressed and extended the particular powers and interests of individual rulers and dynasties; in them...political prerogatives were undifferentiated components of privileged social standing. In general, those entities were structured as loose configurations of powerful individuals and their groups of followers and associates, with uncertain or varying spatial boundaries. On that account, the conduct of political activities lacked those characteristics of intensity, continuity and purposefulness which follow from entrusting such activities to an expressly designed, territorially bounded organisation. (1990: 25)

bourgeois became the personnel of the state itself, shaping the agenda of state action in favour of the free market, capital and the protection of private property.

What gave the nineteenth century project of the state effective momentum and legitimation was the idea of the "nation" itself, the "named human population sharing an historic trajectory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members" (Smith, 1991:14). The nation belongs, as Weber suggested, in the realm of cultural values and "specific sentiments of solidarity in the face of other groups" (cited in Gerth and Mills, 1958: 172). As such, its constituent material is historically fluid and "imagined", not fixed nor timeless (Anderson, 1983). Furthermore, its relation to the state is highly complex and varied. Not all states coincide with nations and vice versa. In some cases, France, for instance, the nation was imposed from above by the centralised state - in this case as a territorialist, assimilationist and political unit that crystallised around French citizenship. This was the process that turned "peasants into Frenchmen". In Germany, on the other hand (which suffered from a supine bourgeoisie in the eighteenth century), no centralised state existed until later and nationhood was more restrictive, ethnocultural and "differentialist", based on *volk*-centred understandings of German lineage (Brubaker, 1992). In the Netherlands, the seventeenth century territorial partitioning of the region into north and south militated against a unified sense of state and nationhood until 1806 when Napoleon made his brother king of Holland. And in Italy, Austrian rule presented an obstacle to national unity until the late nineteenth century (Seton-Watson, 1977).

Taking the "view from above", however, what is clear is that the state gave the nation, as an artifice, clarity and political function. More often than not, nations were the result, not the source of centralised political administrations.<sup>23</sup> The historical development of nationhood was, in turn, crucial to the success of the modern state as ideas of "national interest" and "national welfare" had replaced dynastic, religious or historic forms of legitimation. States presented themselves as states of particular nations and thrived on

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<sup>23</sup> Indeed as Hobsbawm puts it: "[the nation] is a social entity only insofar as it relates to a certain kind of modern territorial state, the 'nation-state' and it is pointless to discuss nation and nationality except insofar as both relate to it." (1990: 9-10)

concentrated national sentiments, particularly the patriotism which Rousseau had dubbed the new "civic religion". Legal, military, economic and geographical aims were often pursued in connection with the ideas of nationality and nationhood and monarchies that were to survive had to adapt to this new ground of legitimation. In return, the state gave itself the role of protector of a nation's language, education and history, claiming to act on behalf of all people; it lauded itself, in other words, as the institutional expression of democratic legitimacy. All this was reduced to an ideational commingling of the sovereign populace, state territory, and political self-determination, as in the equation nation = state = people (Hobsbawm, 1990).<sup>24</sup>

Nationalism, the movement and ideology underpinning the idea of the nation, whilst not strictly coterminous or reducible to the state unit, was, nevertheless, its cementing force. Traceable in its modern form to the French Revolution, nationalism helped "invent", "imagine" and "stylise" the nation through the raw materials of culture, and provided the script with which European nation-states authorised their social and political goals. Nationalism was essentially a political force which tried to meld the state as a political unit with the nation as a cultural one, giving rise to a new phase in the history of the nation state (roughly between the 1780s and the 1850s). As Cobban indicates: "Although nation states had existed for centuries, before the nineteenth century no specific relationship had been posited between culture or language and the political state" (1969: 249). The pre-modern configuration (the Hapsburg empire, for instance) had often stood over disparate cultures without the need to congeal or mobilise them. With the extension of the franchise, the electoralisation of politics, and the imperative for nation-states to modernise in the nineteenth century, a unified and homogeneous national identity which could smooth over inequalities was essential. Nationalism, in this sense, was the precondition of the formation of modern society, "and such a vital one that

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<sup>24</sup> Citizenship - the set of general and equal entitlements and obligations vested in individuals with respect to the state - was the formal bond between the people and the state. Hence, "The 'nation', so considered, was the body of citizens whose collective sovereignty constituted them a state which was their political expression. For, whatever else a nation was, the element of citizenship and mass participation or choice was never absent from it" (Hobsbawm, 1990: 18-19).



bourgeois civilisation has on the whole remained cast in its mould" (Nairn, 1970: 45).<sup>25</sup>

An important role in these developments was played by intellectuals and professionals whose discursive and political aims corresponded with those of the dynamic political administration. These groups mobilised popular loyalty to the nation, attempting to bond the population ever closer to the nation's edifice by exploiting new mass systems of communication such as print media. Following the role which Gramsci (1971) attributed to traditional and organic intellectuals, such thinking groups furnished nations with symbolic or semiotic systems of attachment - myths, legends, national figures, invented traditions and so on. They often did so in the idioms of romanticism, appealing to an idealised golden age of poetic figures ("exemplars for collective regeneration in the present", says Smith, 1991: 91), searching for internal subjectivities (the national genius) and furnishing a distrust of the abstract. In Germany, for instance, a form of spiritual romanticism (in the age of Goethe and Schiller) actually helped to forge the idea of the nation itself; providing the structures of thought - individuality, uniqueness, inward feeling, faith in the vitality of traditional cultures - for the constitution and consolidation of a particular "ethnocultural" understanding of nationhood. Equally, nations such as Greece, Hungary, Poland and Italy, who had been "hosts" to absolutist or Napoleonic rule wrested power in the romantic clothes of freedom, employing the trappings of folk-culture and the affirmation of the particular to construct their own sense of nationhood (Nairn, 1974). In Scotland, too, as we shall see, romanticism was a significant cultural force, but was devoid of the separatist impulses of elsewhere.

The relations between material culture and the state, then, are double-edged. While culture in some ways appears to reflect already existing social relations, this belies its complex and active role. The linguistic, semiotic and ideological matrix of nation-states' gestation, including the use of flags, coins, anthems, uniforms and monuments, helped to actively foster an homogenous, standardised public national culture with its own "organic" history. Indeed the formation of a glorious and continuous past, in which

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<sup>25</sup> The wave of nationalism which swept through Europe in this period began in the historic states of France and England, and spread to Italy and Germany, shortly after to central and Eastern Europe, and the more peripheral regions of Iberia, Ireland, and Scandinavia (Nairn, 1974).



national traditions are legitimated in the present, is an enduring feature of nations and states. Such an attempt is particularly apparent in times of rapid social change, when states attempt to concentrate power, for instance.<sup>26</sup>

### **J: Revolutionary Culture. Rituals of Ceremony and State Art Museums**

But what of the affinities between the nation-state and art? How has art and its attendant institutions intersected with the interests of this administrative bloc? Well, the interest the state traces in its excursions into the art world relates both to the preservation of social order and with the consecration of a national culture, promoting national unity ("our heritage") and the nation's standing among other nations (Fyfe, 1993; Becker, 1982). As Fox (1970) indicates, the liberal state only really entered as an active patron in the early nineteenth century, sponsoring projects with official funds for the putative good of the public. It thereby presented itself as the benevolent guardian of the most civilised of human expressions and protector of the arts. In contrast to the patronage of individual aristocrats or monarchs, in other words, administrations authorised their aesthetic pursuits in terms of a representative generality, appealing to the general good and national welfare.

As an example of the state/culture relations, the French case is instructive. Lynn Hunt (1984) has focused on the revolutionary period in its own right (as opposed to linking it to social origins and outcomes - class interests or social conflicts, for instance), as one rich in a potent new political culture of symbols, ideologies, languages and everyday routines. The significance of icons such as the liberty tree, official seals, classical statues, festivals, the calendar, dress, etc., hinged on their ability to re-invent French society and its social relations "and to establish the basis for a new national community" (Hunt, 1984: 12). The rhetorical use of a "utopianized" classical history, for instance, the turning towards Greek and Roman models of liberty and democracy led to the substitution of public statues of Louis XIV and XV with those of the Goddess of

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<sup>26</sup> As Hobsbawm writes in this connection: "the 'nation', with its associated phenomena: nationalism, the nation-state, national symbols, histories... rests on exercises in social engineering which are often deliberate and always innovative, if only because historical novelty implies invention" (1990: 13).

Liberty and Hercules. This was a semiotic representation of sovereignty which called up connotations of civic virtue, national genius, people power, courage, labour and paternalism. Heavily politicised, culture, here, became an effective instrument that helped to shape the contours of the revolution itself, the ideologies and perceptions of the revolutionary protagonists as well as the idea of the French nation.

The inordinate success of David's role as state-sponsored artist deputy and general propagandist of the Jacobin regime illustrates this point well. David was a crucial figure in the revolution, fashioning the symbolic idioms of popular consumption and masterminding some of the great moments of national *jouissance* - festivals and ceremonies, for instance. He was also pro-active in the re-organisation of Paris' system of museums and academies and the creator of an artistic "revolution" of his own, the likes of which are almost incomparable in the history of art. David's precise form of "puritanical classicism", embodied in pictures such as the *Oath of Horatii*, *Oath in the Tennis Court*, and *The Death of Marat* helped to iconographically meld the republican civic ideals of classicism with the French state and reiterate its commitment to fraternity and a common French identity.<sup>27</sup>

The *Oath of Horatii*, for instance, was a representation of French *fraternité* based on Roman heroic ideals of civic republicanism. The three brothers in the picture take an oath on their father's sword to die for the glory of their fatherland. In this they stoically and unanimously pledge their faith to the glorious ideals of freedom, risking self-sacrifice if necessary. The nation is in evidence, here, as a spirit of fraternal citizens (Smith, 1991).

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<sup>27</sup> Similar examples of monumental classicism are evident in Ingres, Fuseli, Gros and Benjamin West in England, as well as in the works of poets, writers, musicians, sculptors and so on. As Smith writes: "Who more than poets, musicians, painters and sculptors could bring the national ideal to life and disseminate it among the people? In this respect a David, a Mickiewicz and a Sibelius were worth more than several battalions of Father John's Turnerschaften and a Yeats as much as the hurling societies of the Gaelic Association" (1991: 92).



Figure 8: Jacques-Louis David, *The Oath of Horatii*, 1785

David's works were energetic, bold and "masculine" and used dignified colours. As such, they bespoke an official taste, translated as the utility of classical art, and sanctioned by a government espousing a rhetoric of "popular consent" and "general good". As far as the revolutionaries were concerned, art no longer signified incidental decoration, ornament or luxurious spectacle, but in itself possessed transformative effects. The conscious turning of art into state propaganda, as an instrument of social change, as inspirational, was something inconceivable in the previous century. But the shackles of patrimonialism and private splendour had been broken: art was no longer of the world, but actively in it, playing a constitutive function. In effect, of course, this was replacing one form of functionalism with another. But the difference was that revolutionary art consecrated national glorification in the form of the state and "public good" rather than kingship and "private splendour". As David was to put it: "Each one of us is responsible to the nation for the talents he has received from nature" (quoted in Hauser, 1962: 138).

The building of art museums was a form of cultural invention with similar aims and effects. At the beginning of the nineteenth century a host of European nation-states were





recognising the role of public museums as instruments of national consciousness, while royal collections were turned over to state or semi-state administrations. Firstly, the augmentation of state-sponsored art museums in the early nineteenth century represented a new urgency to concentrate national pride in the populace at large. National museums, in this sense, took on a similar role to nationalism in general - national and political cohesion and civic progress. Secondly, the centring of such institutions pointed up the importance of national institutions such as museums and academies as tools of national cultural power. According to Fyfe, for instance, "European state formation as museum", more particularly from mid-century, was motored "by industrialisation and class struggle" on an international stage (1993: 16). Thirdly, the museum's emergence demonstrated the new value accorded to the national art collection, framed in a museum as a cultural asset for the expanding apparatus of "micro" governance.

Carol Duncan has argued that institutions such as museums "made (and still make) the state look good: progressive, concerned about the spiritual life of its citizens, a preserver of past achievements and a provider for the common good" (1991: 93). Nineteenth century museums were ideal monuments to democracy, and as such evinced and reproduced a set of key values - citizenship, public participation, civilisation, heritage, common humanity - all ideological food for the liberal bourgeois state in its role as guardian of a nation's artistic heritage. This is most explicit with the Louvre, the prototypical public art museum and symbol of the bourgeois state as it evolved in the age of democratic revolutions.

#### *i) The Louvre as National-State Monument*

In August 1793, the anniversary of the fall of the monarchy, the Louvre was opened by decree as "a Monument Dedicated to the Love and Study of the Arts". It consisted of five hundred and thirty seven paintings and one hundred and eighty four objects on tables, open to the public on three out of every ten days and displayed in dramatic form the glory of the Republican Government. Once a private palace of kings the Louvre was now a *leitmotif* for the overthrow of the *ancien regime* and homage to the French nation-state. The nationalised museum was intended to "attract and impress foreigners", in the words

of the Minister of the Interior, who continued:

It should nourish a taste for fine arts, please art lovers and serve as a school to artists. It should be open to everyone. This will be a national monument. There will not be a single individual who does not have the right to enjoy it. It will have such an influence on the mind, it will so elevate the soul, it will so excite the heart that it will be one of the most powerful ways of proclaiming the illustriousness of the French Republic. (Cited in Duncan and Wallach, 1980: 454)

On Napoleon's rise to power, foreign conquests further augmented the collection over the next twenty years with art from Italy, Greece, Egypt and the Low Countries. Such renowned pieces as the *Läocoon*, the *Apollo Belvedere*, Raphael's *Transfiguration* and Corregio's *St. Jerome* were requisitioned by a special committee, led by the expert Denon. Spectacular processions brought the booty back to Paris in chariots under the rhetoric of moral indemnity; these pictures and statues were finding their "natural" home in the well-spring of "liberty, creativity and genius".

In 1803 the Louvre was re-named the "Musée Napoleon" in honour of the contribution the Emperor had played in its formation. The layout of the collection now fell in with the procedures established in the Enlightenment and followed by other museums. Pictures were organised into schools - Italian, French, Dutch and Flemish. A catalogue was provided and each work given an explanatory text which gave information on the artist and subject the "first catalogue to be aimed at the average citizen", says Hudson (1987). France now had a museum which appeared fully secular, public and national - a monument to democracy, civilisation and international cultural domination.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> As "capital of the nineteenth century", Paris also had the most vigorous art market in Europe and much of its high art status related to this. Lorente has written on the nineteenth century metropolises of Paris and London as "art capitals" with highly developed art fields that attracted collections, living artists, dealers and patrons. An early form of culture-as-urban-regeneration was most evident in Paris and accompanied the victory of the city over the country in cultural matters generally. Artists naturally gravitated to Paris and used modern communication systems to keep an eye on developments in the capital while residing elsewhere. As Lorente writes, "Paris became an artistic Mecca. Artists from all around the world would take periodic pilgrimages to Paris and, once back home, they would keep an attentive eye on its art scene" (1996: 190).



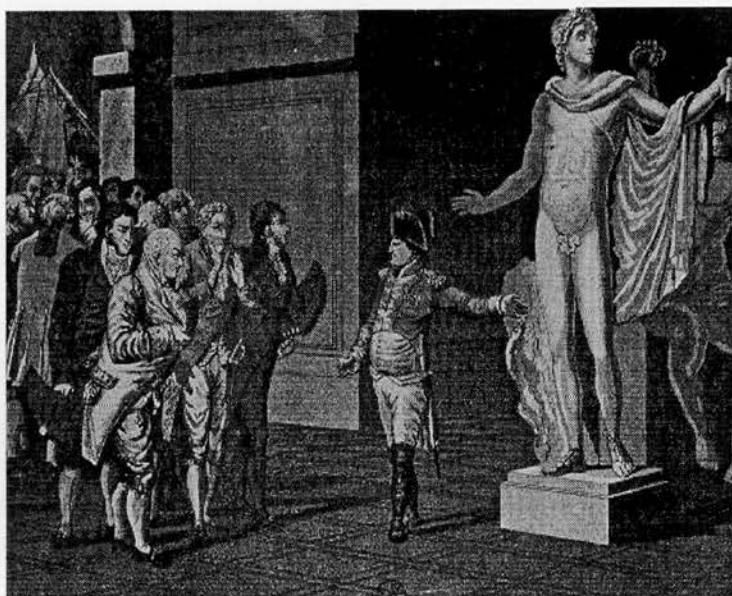


Figure 9: *Napoleon Bonaparte Showing the Apollo Belvedere to His Deputies*, Anonymous etching

In their seminal essay, "The Universal Survey Museum" (1980), Duncan and Wallach outline the ways in which museums function ceremonially to concentrate national pride by using certain methods of inscription, display arrangements and decorative schemes. In the Louvre, the development of display principles which grouped works of art according to national schools and art-historical periods recodified the exhibition space to suit the visibility of the French Republic in two main ways.

On the one hand, the art objects inside were no longer displayed as repositories of wealth or colonial power but were resocialised to connote spiritual value or national genius. The Louvre's chronological hang, based on international standards of taxonomy, transformed signs of luxury, status and splendour of the *ancien regime*, into objects of a universal spirit (genius) but embodied most gloriously in the particulars of French art. On the ceiling of the vestibule of the Louvre, for instance, four medallions symbolised the key art historical schools, each personified by a female figure holding a famous example of its sculpture. For Egypt, a cult statue was used; for Greece, the *Apollo Belvedere*; for Italy, Michelangelo's *Moses*; and for France, Puget's *Milo of Crotona*. France, in this schema, became the *telos* of humankind's most civilised achievements. Now presented alongside art's awakening, flowering and renaissance, the French nation and its individual geniuses took their places, in the Louvre, within the developing canon of art history. A

visit to the Louvre was "scripted" accordingly as a ritual of national glorification, with the interior space forming "an ensemble that functions as an iconographic programme" (Duncan and Wallach, 1980: 451).<sup>29</sup>

On the other hand, the visitor was now addressed as an idealised citizen of the state and inheritor of the highest values of civilisation. S/he was the recipient of the nation's most profound achievements, beneficiary of the state's ideals of democracy, not the subordinate of the prince or lord. Social relations between the visitor and the collection had shifted, in other words, away from those pertaining to the absolute space of representation, where the visitor was the prince's guest, towards notions of equal access, giving every citizen, in principle, universal rights to art. In short, the state, as an abstract presence, replaced the king as host, all of which is summed up usefully by Duncan in her recent book, *Civilizing Rituals*:

The public art museum addressed its visitor as a bourgeois citizen who enters the museum in search of enlightenment and rationally understood pleasures. In the museum, this citizen finds a culture that unites him with other French citizens regardless of their individual social position. He also encounters there the state itself, embodied in the very form of the museum. Acting on behalf of the public, it stands revealed as keeper of the nation's spiritual life and guardian of the most evolved and civilised culture of which the human spirit is capable. All this it presents to every citizen, rationally organized and clearly labelled. Thus does the art museum enable the citizen-state relationship to appear as realized in all its potential" (1995: 26).

## ii) Other European Examples

Such was the Louvre's influence on other nations that, in its wake, a marked acceleration of national gallery building was set in train throughout Europe, often with the consent of heads of state in those nations. Napoleon's excursions into Spain, Italy and Holland

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<sup>29</sup> The concept of national genius - the unique character whose actions underlie or embody a nation's essence - is one articulated in Rousseau and taken up in Germany, Switzerland, America, Italy, Holland, Russia and Britain. It developed alongside "national character" and in the visual arts its existence was provided as evidence of a "polished" national society with a virtuous history. This suggests another contradictory feature of the art museum. While making explicit *universal* principles of art history (the universal of genius, for instance), the art museum also expresses more *particular* motivations such as national character and style and individuates art works accordingly (Negrin, 1993).

provided a climate in which new national galleries could be formed in subject cities such as Madrid, Milan, Naples and Amsterdam, founded on French-inspired principles of nationhood. In 1810, for instance, Napoleon decreed the formation of a Museum of Painting in Madrid, using funds, partly, from religious orders. This project never materialised, but the seeds had been sown and the Prado was opened to the public in 1819 by Ferdinand VII, and consisted of three hundred and eleven paintings, with a catalogue.

In Germany, on the other hand, and to a lesser extent Italy, the princely kingdom was administratively pro-active. In the former, nationhood lacked the vital political dimension and Germany's system of divided states made for a less integrative structure of rule, precluding the idea of a single state sponsored gallery (Germany had no single capital city, for instance). Yet the Altes Museum in Berlin was opened in 1830 on return of the paintings acquired by France, and helped articulate a "national identity in Prussia in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars" (Telman, 1996: 5). The works inside no longer served as expressions of private wealth (of the Hohenzollern family), but came to symbolize Prussian national heritage. Indeed, in the "Riga Memorandum" of 1807, the Prussian minister von Altestein advised the king that the "fine arts are the expression of the highest condition of mankind" (cited in Duncan and Wallach, 1980: 457) and that the nation had a duty to make them accessible to all. Elsewhere in Germany, the collections of the Alte Pinakothek and the Glyptothek both in Munich, opened in the 1830s and a Bavarian national museum was established in 1867 (Alexander, 1979).

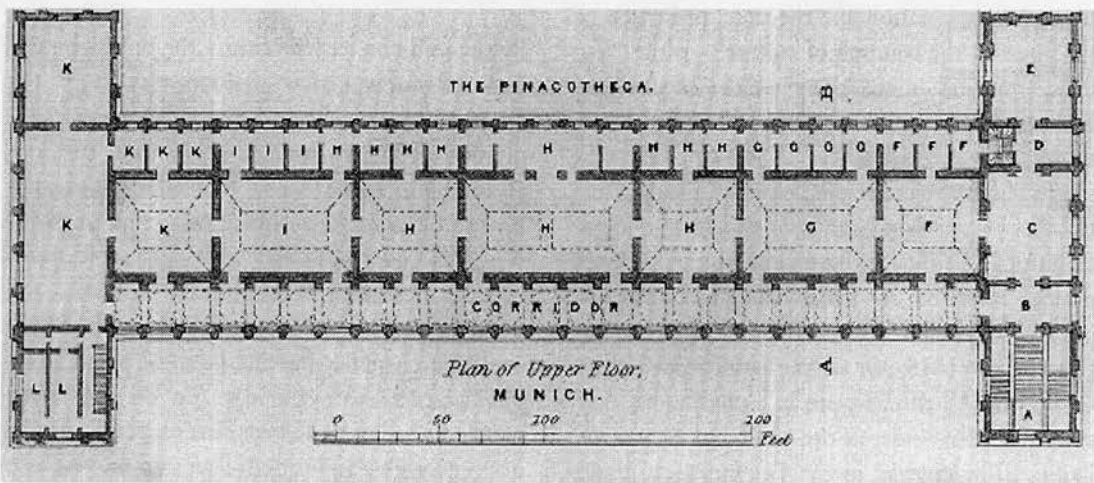


Figure 10: Upper floor plan of von Klenze's Alte Pinakothek, Munich, 1826-36

In the Netherlands, the foundation of the Rijksmuseum dates from 1808, the year in which Napoleon's brother transferred his court from Utrecht to Amsterdam with the aim of making it a centre for art and learning. In 1810 Holland was annexed directly to France but on the abdication of King Louis-Napoleon the French state no longer took responsibility for the collection, it being handed over to the city of Amsterdam. On Dutch independence the museum was once again elevated into a state institution, with a national purchase grant. Money was spent on Dutch and Flemish masters, but the collection was formed as a fragmented patchwork of donations and bequests, and by 1830, with the outbreak of Revolution in Belgium, purchases were severely cut. The religious divisions (the north remained Protestant, the south Catholic), foreign military occupation and overseas economic opportunities all made for an uncertain sense of national unity in the Netherlands. Despite having one of the richest fields of visual art in Europe, as well as a powerful bourgeoisie, Holland suffered a form of syncopated rule which militated against the early flowering of a national art museum. As it was, the Rijksmuseum remained, ceremonially, under the charge of the sovereign prince, albeit on behalf of the people, as was the case in other nation-states (Westermann, 1996).

Notwithstanding local idiosyncrasies, then, what is clear is that the museum was truly beginning to find its "national" character by the early nineteenth century. Extreme examples can be found elsewhere. Lewis (1992a), for instance, indicates the role that museums in Hungary and Czechoslovakia played in this period. In the former, the national museum was built with voluntary taxes and helped to congeal a sense of national heritage so crucial to the independence movement. In Prague, the ascendance of nationalism underpinned the founding of a museum in 1818 given over to the concentration of cultural identity and the study of Czech and Slovak history. In Russia, despite functioning as a royal museum up to the revolution, the Hermitage, opened in 1852 by Nicholas I, is said to have fulfilled most of the functions of a national museum.<sup>30</sup> And in France, as well as the Louvre, Lenoir's *Musée des Monuments Français*, formed

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<sup>30</sup> Initial directives stipulated that visitors had to acquire an admission ticket and wear regimental or aristocratic attire. These conditions were abolished in the 1860s, yet the Hermitage remained under nominal royal authority until 1917 (Lewis, 1992a).



during the early stages of the Revolution, was devoted partly to art and partly to national history.

Moreover, France's provincial museums inhabited the same cultural and ideological space as the Louvre, as agencies for state prestige. As Sherman has written, the *envois* system of the early nineteenth century, whereby surplus old master works from the Louvre were sent out to the Provinces of Bordeaux, Marseilles and Rouen, made the state visible throughout France. "It would be only a mild exaggeration" he writes, "to say that the state attached less importance to the pictures themselves than to the labels on them that said '*Don de l'Empereur*' (gift of the emperor) or later, more modestly but no less clearly, '*Dépôt de l'Etat*' (deposit of the State)" (Sherman, 1989: 14).

Mirroring the museum's interior arrangements, we find that the exterior style was also significant. Throughout the nineteenth century, scores of museums, libraries and other cultural institutions were built in the Greek revivalist form, connoting the potent values of classical republicanism, democracy and ideas of learning and inspiration. The building's external spatial structure dramatised certain modes of experience and safeguarded the ideological interests of those who sponsored it. The temple façades, the porticos and columns, the neoclassical ornamentation all served to demonstrate the civility and nobility of the state and its claims to reproduce the historical values of imperial Rome. As such, the neoclassical style transformed the building into a "ritualistic event", and marked off the visit as virtually sacrosanct. "As such" writes Duncan, "it helps bind the community as a whole into a civic body, identifying its highest values, its proudest memories, and its truest truths" (1991: 90-91).

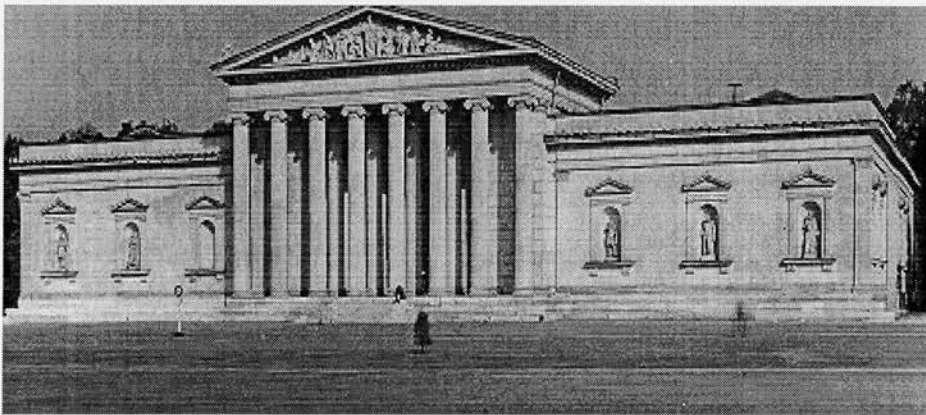


Figure 11: The Glyptothek, Munich



Official state competitions for designs often stipulated the style to be Greco-Roman. Seling points out, for instance, that the design of the Glyptothek in Munich had been directed by the Crown Prince of Bavaria, who wrote to the architect asking him to prepare "a building suitable for arranging works of sculpture" according to the "purest Greek style", with "a portico of fluted columns in the Doric order" (1967: 111). The architect, Klenze, later said of the building: "A museum is no drawing office, academic menagerie and studio", it existed "for all kinds of visitors ... more an institution for the nation than for the student of art" (quoted in Seling, 1967: 112). In France in the period 1744-1846, architectural competitions for museums, libraries and galleries was a central exercise of French national academies. And other neoclassical museums included the Prado, the Pio-Clementino and the Altes museum.

According to Markus (1993), mechanisms of official architectural sponsorship guaranteed that the social and functional demands of the sponsor were heeded but also veiled (as was the case with Foucault's "disciplinary spaces" - prisons, asylums, workhouses, schools and other "moral spaces"). The arbitrary nature of the design "pact" as a form of socio-political power was masked behind programmatic and technical briefs, with their "neutral" and "objective" patina. All this made revealing the power behind the official text to be a fatuous enterprise, if only because power, following Foucault, was made invisible. As Charles Saumarez-Smith has commented on national museums, generally: "One of the things that is uncomfortable about the way a state-run museum operates is that it maintains a belief in anonymous authority" (1989: 17). This "governmental" side to public museums represents an additional entry point on the intercourse between the state and such institutions.

### *iii) Museums, Governance and the "Ethical State"?*

At the "micro" level, the state's interest in raising the general level of civilisation amongst its population imprinted in a variety of ways, many of which Foucault (1977), at pains to avoid state-reductionism, has subsumed under the processes of "normalisation" and "discipline". As administrations expanded and sought to extend their control over society, they increasingly specified norms of individual behaviour and conduct by example and

enforcement. Increasing daily bonds between citizen and state solidified in areas such as education, welfare and policing, but also in the fabric of museum culture.

Much of the content of such improvement was a legacy of courtly society. As Elias (1982) has noted, for instance, formal and informal regulations on sex, violence, table manners and spitting grew out of courtly etiquette. The development of bourgeois modes of conduct, however, took a pointed form in the nineteenth century as this class translated eighteenth century civilizing impulses from the public sphere - cafes and debating societies - into the promulgations of government itself.<sup>31</sup> But bourgeois elites no longer *wanted* to merely *educate*, they *needed* to *govern* the populace, particularly that section of the populace which could pose a threat to their new-found security.

Museums were, it has been argued, institutions which fitted neatly into the project of what Gramsci called the "ethical state" as it sought to "raise the great mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level, a level (or type) which corresponded to the needs of the productive forces for development" (Gramsci, 1971: 258). Like other "improving" spheres such as libraries and public parks, museums were enlisted as instruments of social management which, as Bennett has recently explained, exemplified a new form of "governmental" power. This aimed "at producing a citizenry which, rather than needing to be externally and coercively directed, would increasingly monitor and regulate its own conduct" (1995: 8).

Statements on the moral efficacy of museums from the founders of these institutions were particularly evident from mid-century. As "antidotes to brutality" (as Henry Cole was to put it in 1874), revolving around the ale house, radical working group, or fair, museums were believed to improve the moral health of the subordinate classes by improving their "inner selves", their habits, manners and beliefs.<sup>32</sup> Hence, the value of rational programmes of education in science and history museums, in particular, in the nineteenth century, rested on their promotion of forms of pedagogy, emulation and

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<sup>31</sup> The bourgeois take on conduct was given further expression in evaluations on the benefits of the patriarchal family, domestic morality and economic self-reliance.

<sup>32</sup> Such "improvements", incidentally, were also bound up with ideas of national advancement; for a utilitarian instrument of moral betterment was simultaneously an instrument of national welfare.

new norms of "bodily deportment" - posture, discipline, silence, respectable dress, clean shoes, and so on. A visit to the museum was considered to be a "rational recreation" (Buckingham, quoted in Bennett, 1995: 18), which might lift popular taste and design, improve the industriousness of the population and help prevent disorder and rebellion.

Schemes of education and statements on moral improvement, then, were servitors for new forms of self-management and social cohesion that absorbed the problematic "masses" within the legitimate confines of liberal power.<sup>33</sup> In Foucauldian terms, the political rationality of the museum illuminated a technology of power that governed by seeming not to govern. The state worked at a removed distance to shape mental and moral behaviour, to regulate conditions of life of individuals and populations. "Governmental" power, in this sense, worked in contrast to the modalities of absolutist, one-dimensional force, by investing itself in populations which governed themselves. Or as Bennett puts it:

Rather than embodying an alien and coercive principle of power which aimed to cow the people into submission, the museum - addressing the people as a public, as citizens aimed to inveigle the general populace into complicity with power by placing them on this side of a power which it represented to it as its own (1995: 95).

For Bennett, this accounts for the discourse of museum reform in the nineteenth century, as it pleaded for universal access. Clearly, new technologies of power and governance could only be effective if the museum doors were open to those at which these technologies were aimed. The museum had to be refashioned in the nineteenth century to give its civilising role priority - detaching the museum from ethics of royal splendour and placing it firmly within the realms of popular enlightenment and social regulation. Hence the "reordering of things" in the museum according to historicist tropes of evolution was a programme of public instruction which called up the citizen as a "progressive subject" who would be "auto-tuned to the requirements of the new forms of social training" and whose functions "provided the museum with a salient point of

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<sup>33</sup> It is no accident that the fear of popular disorder attended the wake of unsettlement on the continent, the rise of working class movements and the semantic shift in the word "mass" to connote "mob" and "unruly crowd" (Williams, 1976).

external reference and connection" (Bennett, 1995: 47).

### **K: Art Museums, Exclusion and Bourgeois Distinction**

While convincing as an explanation of the governmental rationale of state-run museums, the thrust of such arguments, however, remains relatively weak in relation to art museums. If Foucauldian and Gramscian interpretations are suitable armatures in the realm of governance and moral regulation (and even Foucault's system must be criticized for failing to register the state in any meaningful sense) then they must be supplemented by interpretations that pay closer attention to the dimension of distinction in the rise of art. For as Bourdieu writes: "Museums could bear the inscription: Entry for art lovers only. But there clearly is no need for such a sign, it all goes without saying" (1993: 257).

Despite, then, expressing national sentiments of political virtue and on the face of it encouraging the inclusion of new publics, art museums were restrictive and exclusionary enclaves for elites and their attendant "modes of distinction" (Fyfe, 1993). In fact, art museums were far less embedded in discourses of popular instruction than say natural history or science museums because fine art was also the symbolic resource for the differentiation of bourgeois elites from other social groups. Hence the idea of public access, far from being a total or complete translation of Enlightenment or state values concerning edification, was, rather, based on a limited conception of what "the public" comprised of.

One of the shortcomings of Habermas' (1989a) comments on the public sphere is his tendency to idealise it as a universal realm of progressive sociality and to fail to take seriously the class, gender and property-bound basis of participation. Many commentators have picked up on this omission in order, in some cases, to rescue Habermas' principal statements from idealism. Eley, for instance, acknowledges the value in some of Habermas' analytical and historical propositions but is critical of his overlooking of the public sphere as the institutionalised support for the nineteenth century bourgeoisie and as such, "the constitutive organisational form of a new force for cultural and political change, namely, the natural social power and self-consciously civilized values of a bourgeoisie starting to see itself as a general or universal class"



(Eley, 1994: 304). This charge formulates into a general critique of the voluntary associations, reading clubs and discussion circles comprising the public sphere as organisations of repression, exclusion and differentiation. It also points up the normative presuppositions underlying the very definition of this sphere as "public".<sup>34</sup>

The emergence of the art museum is heavily implicated here. As a realm of cultural association the museum was never merely an instrument of national-state cohesion, based on the inclusion of wider national constituent publics. It was also a chief institutional site in which middle-class elites could elaborate their own signifiers of cultural distinction, articulate a distance from other social groups, and select/deselect appropriate categories of individual for inclusion/exclusion. Despite being lauded as fully democratic institutions, unconditionally open to all groups, the practices of the art museum served to reinforce the cultural divide between classes. It has been the work of Pierre Bourdieu which has been most important in investigating this exclusionary side to high art and its institutions, and some of his key propositions will be considered.

In the process of its formulation as an institution of high morality, the art museum, more than other museums, was set up in opposition to places of popular assembly such as fairs, taverns and commercial stores. These latter realms of the "carnavalesque" (to borrow Bakhtin's phrase) were negatively coded, according to official discourses, as "vulgar", "barbaric" and hence as "other". The modes of behaviour associated with the popular classes were emphatically occluded from the museum in a way which marked a

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<sup>34</sup> From feminist positions, for instance, Habermas has been charged with failing to seriously address the fact that gender was a basis to social exclusion from the public sphere in modern Europe (Fraser, 1993; Landes, 1988). The normative arrangements of a public sphere necessarily implied a conception of what it was not to be "public". This concerned a construction of a less visible and politically significant realm of privacy, or domesticity, where women were restricted to play out their "naturally" assigned roles as mothers, carers, rearers and household servitors. This embedded them ever deeper into the provinces of hearth and home and their attendant values of frivolity, eroticism, artifice and play. The case for the occlusion of women from cultural spaces like museums has been made by Landes (1988). In this account, respectable women took to other spaces such as the department store or public park, where "women safely reimagined themselves as *flâneurs*, observing without being observed" (Walkowitz, cited in Bennett, 1995: 30). However, it could be that women were not excluded from the museum in the same way and to the same extent that the popular classes were. In fact as Bennett indicates, women were often believed to be mediating agencies for the state's projects to "civilise" working men, and as such to be welcomed into the museum environment.



division between the groups which seemed to "belong" to the museum and those which were alien. Hence, from internal regulations on the prevention of vandalism, the touching of pictures, the restraint of dogs and the carrying of babies, to prescriptions against swearing, spitting, brawling, drinking and dirty footwear, the museum demonstrated the type of visitor and behaviour the museum was to discourage. This paralleled the situation in the literary circles, debating societies and coffee houses of the public sphere generally.

At the same time, ambiguities remained in the effort to make the museum visit a pedagogical experience for popular publics. Despite all the rhetorics of universal access and popular education which underpinned the Louvre, for instance, as McLellan (1994) observes, its internal functioning actually helped to exclude the uneducated and privilege the educated and initiated "bourgeois amateur". Very little help was given to uninitiated visitors in the way of popular guides and there was no education department. Limitations redolent in the organisation of the Altes Museum in *Vormarz* Berlin, similarly, undermines the notion that this was a fully accessible establishment. As Telman indicates, the Altes museum actually served to establish the authority of the political administrators of cultural reform as the arbiters of taste and distinction. This separated the refined from the common, engendering in the latter "an attitude of awe, wonder and quasi-religious respect" (Telman, 1996: 10-11). An artifice used by Schinkel to promote such a mood of "sacred solemnity" was to arrange his classical sculpture on very high pedestals in order to place the visitor on a plane spiritually inferior to that of the sacred objects (Buck and Dodd, 1991).

In other art museums, undifferentiated public access was fiercely countered by artists and curators faithful to the idea that unmediated or popular access spoilt the "silent contemplation of the works of art" (Hudson, 1975: 4). As Thackeray was to write in 1841: "Genteel people...do not frequent the Louvre on a Sunday. You can't see the pictures well, and are pushed and elbowed by all sorts of low-bred creatures" (quoted in Moriarty, 1994: 27). Indeed, across Europe, museums still implemented restricted hours of opening that discouraged working people from attending and audience screening was a widely used method of discriminating between the studious/curious and the plebeian, favour lying purely with scholarly and artistic patronage (Wittlin, 1949).

For Bourdieu, such museological discriminations are understandable if we accept the role of art and high culture as fulfilling certain social functions of legitimating social differences and thereby reproducing power relations. *The Love of Art* (1969) was Bourdieu's initial attempt at an empirically based study of museums which assaulted Kantian and other essentialist theories of cultural taste and cultural production which assumed certain *a priori* faculties towards aesthetic pleasure. The artistic sensitivities which "may be experienced by any human being", as Kant had it (cited in Zolberg, 1992: 160), is revealed by Bourdieu as the privilege of those who have access to the conditions in which "pure" and "disinterested" dispositions are acquired. Hence, museum visiting is unveiled as a socially differentiated activity resting on the possession of educational and cultural dispositions towards art practices and products and, as such, almost the exclusive domain of the cultivated classes.

For Bourdieu, artistic competence - the possession of aesthetic codes and representations - is a precondition for the classification and organisation of artistic knowledge. Individuals can only decipher works of art "aesthetically" as it were, if they have a mastery of the codes and systems of classification which are able to process styles, periods, techniques, and so on. Repeated contact with art via formal and informal education processes encourages the accumulation of these instruments of appropriation, leading to an "unconscious mastery" of the parameters of deciphering art objects. Having a "feel for the game" (*sense pratique*), or a familiarity with art objects, is the outcome of culturally acquired systems of perception, not something naturally or universally programmed. However, this feel is expressed in a form which emphasises its natural, quasi-instinctual and pre-reflexive quality, in the dispositional form of the cultured *habitus*, itself an expression of favourable material conditions of existence.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Habitus* in Bourdieu's use of the Latin term, consists of a system of dispositions acquired in the process of childhood socialisation which function on the practical level as both categories of perception (organisational schemas and principles of classification) and generators of practices and actions. It is Bourdieu's answer to the question regarding how it is that behaviour takes certain trajectories without it being the product of a conscious strategy or reductive cause. Bourdieu's answer is that agents to an extent fall into their behaviour; they act and react to particular situations in a way that is neither necessarily calculated nor simply generated mechanically according to rule obedience. This is the "feel for the game" which comes by

Cultural competences, then, appear as gifts of natural talent and taste, available to all on an equal basis. They are not recognised as accumulated outcomes of differential learning and training (requiring, at least, some distance from material necessities and leisure time). Members of the initiated classes, from this perspective, accept as a "gift of nature" a cultural heritage which is transmitted by a process of unconscious training" (Bourdieu, 1993: 234). The "masters of judgement and taste" appear as rising above the vagaries of material processes, even though they are a definite product of such processes. Culture, in short, is achieved by negating itself as culture (i.e., acquired) and presenting itself as nature (or grace).

It is to this extent that the art museum and its objects remained the natural appurtenance of bourgeois elites. The museum comprised a "pure" space, symbolically opposed to the vulgarities of inns and fairs, a space for polite and informed discourse, where the values of civilised bourgeois culture were coded and decoded by this class itself. As Sherman does, we can make sense of a seemingly trivial instance such as the refusal to give up umbrellas at the doors of nineteenth century French provincial museums as an important illustration of the bourgeois urgency to retain the objects and codes of its distinction. The umbrella was a particularly resonant object of middle class apparel, carried even when not raining. Its shape and possession codified the *habitus* and deportment of this class to itself and to others within the museum. Its function was to effect a visible mechanism of differentiation of the holder from other competing groups by speaking of his or her refinement, aloofness or delicacy.

As for art perception itself, bourgeois taste was that which could render visible the more formal and revered qualities of the museum's objects - that could bracket off the disinterested appreciation of style from "naive" or "popular" responses. Bourgeois individuals, in other words, were more likely to come to the museum with the

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familiarisation towards particular situations, objects and sensations. It is almost a corporeal quality in that it exists in and through bodily practices - ways of talking, holding oneself, moving, perceiving, acting. The competences are, in fact, such an integral part of the circumstances in which they are acquired, learned and developed that they are rendered largely incapable of being perceived in their arbitrariness. They merely become "ways things are" (Bourdieu, 1977; 1984; 1990a; 1990b).

instruments of a "pure gaze" capable of apprehending the work as autonomous; that is, "as it demands to be apprehended (i.e., in itself and for itself, as form and not as function)" (Bourdieu, 1993: 256). Inseparable from the development of the autonomous artistic field generally (the capacity for artists to escape the constraints of absolute aesthetic norms, for instance, and the parallel shift to an open market with its dealer/critic system) the pure gaze opened up the museum visit as a learned and informed experience. It made visible the hidden qualities of the museum's objects: stylistic features, authorship, the subtleties of pictorial conventions and representations.

In contrast, the working class could only reduce art to schemes culled from everyday life - to function, to its age, renown or price, categories which emerged from the "existential" social situation of this class. This is the kind of response to art which Kant termed "impure" and "barbarous" because it reduced pleasure to the material senses. It was a response which came to be denied and marginalised by the dominant aesthetic because it expressed a "lower", "distasteful" and "coarse" form of enjoyment that was the antithesis to disinterested and refined appreciation.<sup>36</sup>

Such a separation between modes of art perception had already crystallised into the normative and institutional distinctions subtending restricted/high versus large scale/popular systems of cultural production (Bourdieu, 1993; DiMaggio, 1987). High art was the symbolically potent system of classification codified by the apposite cultural experts, discourses (art history, for instance) and nationally consecrated institutions that included orchestras, theatres and other "serious" civic institutions with established conventions of public demeanour and cultural restraint. Art museums emerged within this system as a similar organisation of cultural authority, based on the collective action of elites that bound these elites ever closer to consecrated culture.

All this underpinned the sense of belonging of some social groups over others in

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<sup>36</sup> Of course the bourgeois position also aligned it against the older aristocracy and its modes of conspicuous consumption. Such overt display was targetted as belonging to an era of excess and grandeur, which bourgeois nation-states were beginning to curtail. This was particularly the case in England as will be argued in the next chapter. Instead, the bourgeoisie affirmed its ability to appreciate the subtleties, purities and transcendentals of contemplative artistic beauty: of art *qua* art.



the art museum - a feeling that was reinforced in the minute details of its internal functioning:

Everything, in these civic temples in which bourgeois society deposits its most sacred possessions, that is, the relics inherited from a past which is not its own, in the holy palaces of art, in which the chosen few come to nurture a faith of *virtuosi* while conformists and bogus devotees come and perform a class ritual, old palaces or great historic homes to which the nineteenth century added imposing edifices, built often in the Greco-Roman style of civic sanctuaries, everything combines to indicate that the work of art is as contrary to the world of everyday life as the sacred is to the profane. The prohibition against touching the objects, the religious silence which is forced upon visitors, the puritan asceticism of the facilities, always scarce and uncomfortable, the almost systematic refusal of any instruction, the grandiose solemnity of the decoration and decorum, colonnades, vast galleries, decorated ceilings, monumental staircases both outside and inside, everything seems done to remind people that the transition from the profane world to the sacred world presupposes, as Durkheim says, 'a genuine metamorphosis.' (Bourdieu, 1993: 237)

Free entrance, in short, was also optional entrance, in practice put aside for those who felt at home in the museum's confines. The rhetorics of universal access, of the art museum as a glorious gift to all of the treasures of a valorised past, may have transcended any notion that the museum was effectively *closed* for some. Indeed, as Bourdieu notes, never is ideology so powerful as when it is dressed up in the idioms of democracy, citizenship or universal enlightenment. Yet it remained the case that the founding of art museums and galleries was inseparable from the struggle of the bourgeois class to elevate its own world-view whilst appearing to rise above the realities of material life in the early nineteenth century. As the bourgeoisie reconciled the stylistic demeanor of the aristocracy with instrumental reason, it used the aesthetic (one tool among many, incidentally) to define a space for itself, a sanctuary of high culture that served to produce and reproduce this class' claim to the status of cultural superiors of the social system.

In short, artistic practices and institutions such as museums served to reproduce class relations as incorporated in the *habitus*, since this very internalisation perpetuated the logic of class-derived practice. Legitimate or high culture, as defined, deliberately or not fulfilled a social function of naturalising social differences, and illustrated the way in which consensual recognition of the dominant culture was reproduced. This was partly

dependent on the estrangement of a significant portion of the public from high culture's enclaves. Notwithstanding the contrariety of intention in the thinking of eighteenth and nineteenth century educationalists and populists, in practice, the exclusionary logics of the former princely collections were stubbornly residual in national, public art museums. To a large extent, the art museum functioned as a space of mystification and distancing as well as social regulation. It remained the least accessible museological institution because the aesthetic was at the heart of the middle class' struggle for political and cultural authority.

## **L: Conclusion**

It is well known that the French Romantic artists Eugene Delacroix and Theodore Gericault were regular visitors to the Louvre in the 1820s and 30s. Much of their basic education, their handling of paint, sense of perspective and draughtsmanship, was gleaned while copying the likes of Rubens and the Venetian school. This was also the case with a whole host of European modern artists who flocked to Paris as it became the fertile centre of the art world. The deep significance of such a seemingly prosaic action may well have escaped the notice of those who attended museums so routinely in the first half of the nineteenth century. But their act of attendance speaks volumes, in condensed form, for the complex and profoundly ambiguous trajectory which led up to the art museum's modern existence; for the social upheavals, historical accidents, collective or individual initiatives, which accumulated from the sixteenth century to deliver the national art museum in all its paradoxical glory.

Beginning around the sixteenth century as an overtly private palace of princely glorification, the proto-art museums of European absolutism took up their positions in fields of unitary power, and lent spectacular support to the excesses of sovereign might. In the eighteenth century, in line with transformations in European political administrations, intellectual thought and artistic relations in general, the "enlightened" art museum accumulated, in embryonic form, the features of a modern rationally organised, relatively open institution. Its physiognomy indexed the emergent relations between the state and the public sphere as the *ancien regime* gave way to a more "democratic"

bourgeois universe of social, political and cultural relations.

By the early nineteenth century these forces had achieved optimum effect, and new important forces added. In particular, the expansion of state sponsored museums in the early nineteenth century was a dual process. On the one hand it represented the interests of increasingly bounded European nation-states. National art museums reflected and sustained an array of important official ideologies and identities - popular sovereignty, citizenship, democratic rights and the values of national communities in relation to representative governments. Museums (more so than art galleries) also helped states to integrate their populations into national cultural and territorial units via utilitarian programmes of social regulation and improvement. On the other hand, the art museum was the basis to forms of social exclusion, developed out of the institutions and discourses of the eighteenth century public sphere as a training ground and power base of bourgeois authority. The elaboration of a distinctive sanctuary of high art was part of the construction of new forms of bourgeois distinction from older, competing and lower social strata. Once valorised as an enclave of cultivated taste, pure refinement, and divested of the vulgarities of economic materiality, the art museum helped to secure and naturalise the social and cultural dominance of the *cognoscenti* by appearing to fit naturally with this class' social being. Whilst not causing social differences or inequalities, the art museum nevertheless helped to sustain them.

These were the two modalities or defining principles of power which gave the museum its finality in the nineteenth century. True, they often pulled in different directions, at times resulting in potentially critical tensions. Indeed, they still do today as the museum grapples with the historical dilemmas of double-coding: whether to be shrines for the few or educators for the many, to appeal to the popular or connoisseurial, to be arenas for scholarly virtue or churches for the auratic object. But this never seemed to undermine the efficacy of the museum's social, political and artistic aims. In fact it is testament to the museum's resilience that it has dealt with the fabric of ambiguity and paradox which lies behind its history, accommodating these tensions into its very being. Indeed, most of the European examples mentioned: the Prado, the Rijksmuseum, the Altes museum, the Louvre, and so on, continue to flourish as national, but also,

respectable middle class institutions of fine art.

Before assessing how the cases of England and Scotland fit with some of the general propositions sketched here, it may be instructive to return to Gericault and Delacroix. What was significant about these artists was how closely their artistic fortunes were bound up with that of the art museum, in general; and how their relationship to the underlying principles of the museum's project developed into an attitude which registered the summation of the museum's role in the modern cultural field. The very ability of Romantic artists such as Delacroix and Gericault to paint for a growing open market, prioritize the values of originality and creativity, and thereby affirm a form of artistic subjectivity (the hallmark of Romanticism) was testament to the historical development of the relatively autonomous art field. The shift away from direct commissions with the development of the entrepreneurial system of artistic production was also one of the prerequisites to the foundation of the art museum and the shedding of its princely garments. More than inhabiting the same socio-cultural space, however, for the first time, the likes of Delacroix and Gericault visited museums in order, not just to copy and educate themselves, but to take a critical stance towards the official gloss of the museum and the objects it housed. The romantic reaction to tradition, to the institution of art is a well known phenomenon. It is the beginning of a force in art whereby the avant-garde begins to challenge traditional or academic authority. This is the dynamic at the heart of modernism itself, reaching a definitive position with Manet and the Impressionists.<sup>37</sup> What is important, here, is the explicit position the art museum had reached by mid-century, becoming what modern romantic artists and, later, avant-garde artists and critics from Baudelaire onwards despised in "bourgeois" art. In this process of reaction, however, the art museum also provided the well-spring of references from which modern artists borrowed to push art beyond itself and to attack the institution of art itself. The

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<sup>37</sup> In Foucault's view, modernism was the first tradition of museum painting because it expressed a self-conscious relationship to the tradition of painting and of the institution of art as a whole. Manet's *Dejeuner Sur l'herbe* and *Olympia* for instance were works which self-consciously rendered the tradition of painting as subject matter itself. Through this they achieved a particularistic relationship to the museum and its contents. To an extent, though, this relation was anticipated in the Romanticism of Delacroix and Gericault and their reflections on the old masters and the canon (Negri, 1993).



amassing of works provided the resource for the creative practices of modern artists; the museum, in short, was the precondition for the development of modern art (Negrin 1993).

This sense of reliance on the museum's existence indicates the process by which the present ransacks its history in order to construct its modernity, but it also speaks volumes for the privileged position of the museum by the nineteenth century. Precisely because of its centrality and efficacy, in other words, the museum became both a target and a historical resource for cultural practitioners. The ambiguities implied in this relation between artists and the museum is final testament to the profoundly contradictory nature of the museum's emergence. What is of interest about such ambiguities pertains not to the aesthetics of Romantic opposition but to the history of which it speaks.

The function of this chapter has been to present a set of historical and analytical propositions regarding the socio-cultural genealogy of the national art museum in continental Europe and to relate this to systems of class, power and ideology. I have had to make broad generalisations, unite disparate European cases and offer little in the way of detailed historical description, in order to provide the initial parameters to which the British case(s) can be compared and contrasted. It is now time to transfer my attentions away from continental Europe and towards national art galleries as they develop first in England and, then, in Scotland. Given that my research concerns lay more solidly with the latter case, however, my next chapter on England will be inevitably diminutive. What is important to keep in mind at present is a recognition that the English fine art field and the development of its national art gallery shared many of the characteristics of development outlined above but also displayed local particularities grounded in a peculiar trajectory of social development.

## **“THE PECULIARITIES OF THE ENGLISH”: THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLAND’S NATIONAL GALLERY**

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### **A: Introduction**

E. P. Thompson’s recognition of the “unique equilibrium of forces” (1978: 255), the distinct elements in the complex mix of English social development, is a worthy one. It does not seek to over conflate historical models and yet remains mindful of genealogical commonalities in the onset of European bourgeois modernity. England is late in the development of its national art gallery. This is not to say that it is anomalous, beyond comparison; merely late. The French had their Louvre in 1793, the Swedes their moment of glory a year later; the Prado had been founded in 1819 and the Rijksmuseum in 1808. England’s National Gallery stuttered into existence in 1824, and even then there was no dedicated gallery until 1838. “That nation” one French art theorist quipped of England in the Napoleonic Wars, “has no centralised, dominant collection, despite all the acquisitions made by its private citizens who have naturally retained them for their private enjoyment” (cited in Haskell, 1986: 51). To a large extent he was right. The present chapter is an attempt to investigate some of the social and cultural conditions which mustered around state-art relations in England, chiefly from the eighteenth century, and to sketch the gradual development of a national space for art in the early nineteenth century. It falls into three broad sections which can be matched to those constructed previously: the pre-modern, a period of transition in the eighteenth century and “modern” deliverance in the early nineteenth century. In each profile the development of artistic institutions resembles, in some respects, those on the continent: in other respects English socio-cultural development is distinct, based on evolutionary idiosyncraies.

## **B: Against Courtly Display: England's Fractured Start**

Firstly, then, court culture in England was relatively thin and constantly fractured. Only very briefly, during Charles I's reign, did the spaces of the king resemble those of Madrid, St Petersburg, Naples or Paris. Indeed, that Charles incorporated cultural extravagance into his regal spaces (Hampton, Windsor, Whitehall) indicated a certain acceptance of continental models and ideas, including the divine right of kings. The Spanish court of Philip IV held particular allure for Charles, and by the 1630s Inigo Jones had been briefed to assemble a regal palace, including a ceremonial hall, to be decorated in 1635 by Rubens. Since symbolic display was a predominant function of ceremonial spaces, Charles amassed important works of art, including German, Italian and Flemish masters and Raphael's cartoons used for the Papal tapestries. He also commissioned works by fêted artists such as Rubens and Van Dyck (Alexander, 1979).

All normative arrangements were aborted in the wake of the ruptures of the 1640s, as England's Puritan Parliament wrested power from the monarch and restructured elite rule (Corrigan and Sayer, 1985). The execution of Charles I was as close to revolutionary republicanism as England got. But whereas France symbolically represented the move away from absolutism in a national art museum, England did so by selling the very art that would have formed the core to such a collection (much of which, for now, made its way into the collection of the French king).



Figure 12: Van Dyck's portrait of Charles I, sold by Cromwell on the Continent after the king's execution

Puritan antipathies to the finery and grandeur of royalty, indeed, marked itself long after the Civil War, for shows of regal power were always attenuated, lest history would repeat itself.<sup>1</sup> Collectors such as the Earl of Arundel and the Duke of Buckingham were active, but not common in Caroline England. As for Parliament, the provision of central funds for collecting was out of the question, as the state's *raison d'être* was increasingly marked by economic rationalization and the curbing of unnecessary luxuries (Pears, 1988).



Figure 13: Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel, whose collection was displayed in a “galleria” in his London House.

At the Restoration, a court culture still existed - Purcell composed, Wren designed, Lely painted, all at the behest of Charles II; but any overt deployment of cultural spectacle was unwise and actively discouraged. Financially constrained, and ideologically weakened, a centralised unit of court patronage was fitful in its *modus operandi*. Building and portraiture continued, for they were considered less dangerous forms of cultural display. Lely's brief “to paint blatantly alluring sex”, for instance, (Baker, 1912, cited in Foss, 1971) bound the imperatives of courtly taste with the practices of official “face

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<sup>1</sup> Puritan ire against luxury and sensuous culture, although never as acerbic as the equivalent north of the border (see chapter four) nonetheless stripped much of England's ancient culture, as cathedrals were sacked, libraries seized and pictures burnt (Foss, 1971).



painters”.<sup>2</sup> Matters of *realpolitik*, however, tempered Charles II’s expenditure on aesthetic matters and for the rest of his reign no large-scale purchases and few commissions were made beyond decorative schemes and portraits. Moreover, the lack was not lamented, for pragmatism heralded a more substantial prize: “Great pity it was we lost the Pictures; but however, we may console ourselves with the reflection, that we preserved our Liberties” (Walpole, cited in Pears, 1988: 134).<sup>3</sup>

The settlement of 1688-1714 made any further attempts at aesthetic grandiloquence inconceivable. Kensington Palace, the dwellings of William III and Mary, possessed some spaces for artistic display - two “long galleries” in particular - but these did not compete in regal splendour with examples in France and elsewhere. Britain’s concerted lurch towards a national Protestant identity was clearly implicated in the commercial aggrandizement of the modern age (Colley, 1992); but the turn towards sobriety and abstinence did not favour the kinds of centralised enactments of visual power that induced national collections in Europe. In fact the wars with France preoccupied the king above any need for baroque affirmation, and many of the institutions of art, music, poetry and theatre dissipated.<sup>4</sup> Even Kneller’s court art - his *Hampton Court Beauties*, painted for Queen Mary for instance - lacked the *largesse* and awe of previous attempts under the later Stuarts.

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<sup>2</sup> Lely, at Charles’ request, painted a naked Nell Gwynne, for instance, as well as various courtiers in settings that attempted to elevate their symbolic standing at court (Foss, 1971).

<sup>3</sup> Besides the reduction of the signs of princely power, the effect on English painting was also marked: many painters, both indigenous and foreign, fled London to look for alternative outlets, leaving only a small coterie of court artists amongst whom favour was concentrated.

<sup>4</sup> William III chose to turn Greenwich into a hospital for retired seamen, for instance; and when Queen Anne succeeded in 1702 Hampton Court was neglected. British monarchs appeared to be divergent in their uses of space, which militated against a centralised and accumulative royal centre. So whilst there were 10,000 artists, actors, courtiers, servants, cooks, etc. living at Versailles by the 1740s, England had less than 2,000 at any particular location in the same period (Colley, 1992).



Figure 14a: One of Lely's *Windsor Beauties* from the court of Charles II



Figure 14b: One of Kneller's *Hampton Court Beauties* from the more austere court of William and Mary

This is really to say no more than that state-building in England was gradual and deliberate. It was distinguished by social, religious and political conditions that made it unlikely to assemble a national collection either by the magnanimous offer of an enlightened monarch or by the confiscation of such a collection by “the people” in revolution (Duncan, 1995). In contrast to France, the king and court did not limit the boundaries of social power and the English upper classes were courtly neither in style nor ambition. Moreover, the social barriers between higher elites and the bourgeoisie, which operated in France to distinguish Louis XIV from lower orders, were less solid and more permeable in England (Elias, 1983).

What is distinctive about English social development, as many commentators have observed, is its evolution as a series of adaptations and “waves” rather than disjunctures (Thompson, 1978; Anderson, 1969; Corrigan and Sayer, 1985). However motivated the middle-ranks were to rise triumphant from the vestiges of feudal convention, it was never on the cards for them to do so without a process of absorption and accommodation (Anderson, 1969; Wiener, 1981). All of which made the transition to an eighteenth century “civil society” in England less a matter of confrontation with absolutism, and more a gradual easing into power of Britain’s most powerful social constituency - the aristocracy.

## **C: Eighteenth Century Beginnings: Civic Humanism and the Country House Collection**

It is not difficult to see why England, and more particularly London, assumed its position of dominance in the art market during the eighteenth century. The potent mix of urban, commercial modernity and aristocratic wealth delivered to the visual arts a support system that rivaled that of France. When Richardson in 1715 decried the absence of connoisseurs and British lethargy in matters of painting, he wrote before the onset of progress that distinguished the Georgian art field (Mannings, 1991). Artists, galleries and academies flourished and patrons spent money on the arts as a newly valorized sphere of “taste”. Hogarth’s achievements at mid-century indicated a thriving urban market in popular prints, and a movement towards commerce and professionalization that found expression in his academy at St Martin’s Lane, opened in 1735 and the Royal Academy in 1768. A public of eager consumers for literature, music and the arts crystallised in this era, linking, via a commercial matrix, the practice of artists with the cultural needs of middle and upper class audiences (Plumb, 1972; Bermingham and Brewer, 1995). And a burgeoning sphere of intellectual life (coffee houses, journals and novels) in England’s capital helped to channel the flows of intellectual achievement into the realities of commercial, agricultural and artistic improvement, even if this did not amount to a self-conscious movement of enlightenment as it did in France and Scotland.

Not that the crown contributed a great deal to this rapid take-off. While Hanoverian succession was an expedient political tactic, and though George III made some financial contributions to the Royal Academy, there was further dilution of royal patronage. As Horace Walpole wrote, “No reign, since the arts have been in any esteem, produced fewer works that will deserve the attention of prosperity” (cited in Foss, 1971: 111). The benefits to be gained from royal patronage were no longer immediately visible, for artists often went unrewarded for their work. More attractive outlets for patronage lay elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> It was left, therefore, to the aristocracy to foster the complex of artistic

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<sup>5</sup> Having said this, the king’s influence was still sought as a guarantee of official recognition and permanence, as was the case with the Royal Academy. Indeed, the king’s official contribution was one way in which the Academy encouraged the public to treat it more seriously and to legitimate payment (Pears, 1988).

institutions and practices of the eighteenth century; which it did under the discursive authorisation of gentlemanly status - taste and civility.

For much of the century the approved gentleman of taste emerged in the practices and sites of England's artistic and political culture. Although relations between factions of the old aristocracy and new commercial classes were never without tension, for now the landed (particularly Whig) oligarchy was firmly in control and illustrated this in its assured marriage with the arts.<sup>6</sup> "Taste" was one dimension of this security, concentrating aristocratic notions of virtue in the context of civil society. A unity of English society under the banner of "country" was the manifold assertion of a community of propertied citizens, relatively distinct from the crown's patronage powers, whose classical education (culled from the Grand Tour) marked them as rulers both in politics and the arts. As Pocock (1972) has indicated, ideal notions of citizenship grew from the Renaissance traditions of classical republicanism and civic humanism, and were articulated in the classical idioms of the Georgian age through figures such as Harrington and Bolingbrooke (I will return to the civic humanist trope in chapter five). Classically, "the moral health of the civic individual consisted in his independence from governmental or social superiors, the precondition of his ability to concern himself with the public good, *res publica*, or commonweal" (Pocock, 1972: 121).

Since economic well-being and possession of independent landed property underpinned the capacity to remain cushioned from the vagaries of "corruption" and "interestedness", this ideology both reflected and sustained the aristocrats social ascendancy. The "agrarian man of independent virtue" (Pocock, 1972: 121) translated into the arts as the connoisseur, the critic and the true judge of beauty. It was a model implied in Reynolds's *Discourses*, in which the first President of the Royal Academy sanctified Grand Manner pictures that evoked classical or historical scenes in noble style,

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<sup>6</sup> The involved question of class factionalism in relation to eighteenth century English social development lies beyond the scope of this chapter. Having refuted the Nairn/Anderson thesis that England never produced a thorough-going bourgeoisie, Thompson (1978) maintains that agrarian capitalism in the eighteenth century was vigorously championed by a capitalist landowning class that, though not fully integrated with some aspects of modernity, was nevertheless far from antithetical to modern capitalist interests (particularly in the wake of the Jacobite and French revolutions).



above landscape or common portraiture. The academic doctrine of the rational ideal glorified the highly abstract and general and disparaged circumstantial detail and reference to the particular (and thereby the world as bodily or material) (Barrell, 1986; Bohls, 1993). It was a model that permeated a range of writing on aesthetic themes - the picturesque (with its disavowal of working landscapes), taste, genius, landscape gardening and beauty. In Shaftesbury, the aestheticization of virtue translated into the importance of taste as “disinterested perception”, which, of course, was “directed to the higher and nobler species of humanity” (cited in Humphreys, 1991). In Locke, only possessive individuals were qualified citizens of civil society; in Smith, the idealised man of taste was implied in the “impartial spectator”; in Hume it was the good judge of beauty.



Figure 15: Grand Manner portrait of Thomas Coke, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Leicester, by Pompeo Batoni

All of these eighteenth-century aesthetic interventions reinforced a community of consensus, the solidarity of an elite social group suited to govern; and by implication the exclusion of and distancing from social forces that fell outside this community - the bodily, the material, the particular, the unpropertied and by implication women and the lower classes (Stallybrass and White, 1986). The aesthetic sphere in eighteenth century Britain emerged as a means to unify a common class identity; it therefore transposed and reproduced the imperatives of aristocratic social and economic power into the sphere of the arts. Bohls summarizes:

The capacity to abstract from the particular to the general, developed, for example, through a taste for the right type of art, 'elevates' citizens' minds, helping them overcome differences between their private interests and individual ways of seeing by leading them toward a consensual apprehension of the world at the fundamental level of perception itself. Reynolds implies that the promotion among a select group of citizens of a cohesive community of vision or taste, a civic humanist art, contributes to the 'security of society'. That security depends on solidarity among the governing elite to resist those who, because their labor confines their views to sense gratification and private interest, are a constant danger to the state. (Bohls, 1993: 22)

In other words, Bourdieu's description of the "aesthetic attitude" as a "paradoxical product of conditioning by negative economic necessities - a life of ease" (1984: 3) is one that fair describes the growing socio-cultural authority of Britain's aristocracy. That civic humanism was a discourse increasingly destabilized by those of commerce and the market is clear (and the implications of this on the arts can be traced in Solkin, 1992); but core elements remained in transmuted form, to become central to the formation of British civil society and an understanding of the "nation" itself (Pocock, 1975). Nowhere was this more visible than in country house culture and the social space of the eighteenth century English art collection.

This century was, indeed, the classical age of the country house, in which no English gentleman could effect influence without recourse to the best of architecture, fashionable landscape design and rich furnishings (Girouard, 1978). The proliferation of the refined, Palladian and neo-classical piles of Vanburgh, Wren, Campbell and Adam across England were fittingly restrained and chaste - not over-elaborate, but splendid enough (Jeffery, 1992). Size still mattered, however. As Girouard writes, "the size and pretensions of such houses were an accurate index of the ambitions - or lack of them - of their owners" (1978: 3). Thus, the great houses of Chatsworth, Houghton, Blenheim and Woburn matched in grandeur the socio-political influence of England's leaders. On the one hand, town provided landowners with modern ideas on how to run their estates, turning them into agents of improvement. On the other hand, country provided them with the wealth, political power and social prestige that guaranteed their ruling position in the

social order.<sup>7</sup> For as the discourse of civic humanism had it, property was *the* precondition for the virtuous exercise of citizenship and public office.<sup>8</sup>



Figure 16: Chatsworth House, west front, 1700-03, owned by the Duke of Devonshire

Robert Walpole's estate in Norfolk was certainly a dimension of his political power. Houghton was, in fact, built by leading architects and craftsmen and contained one of the most lavish collections of pictures in England. It was also a source of intra-class rivalry, in that Walpole's brother-in-law, Lord Townshend, ranked the former's estate below his own seat at Raynham and refused to be at home whilst Walpole was entertaining (Girouard, 1978).

Similarly in Norfolk, Thomas Coke's Holkham Hall, built partly by William Kent between 1734-62, was the summation of loyal support to Walpole himself. Coke was appointed post-master general and became Earl of Leicester in 1744. His social ascendancy demanded a suitable context in which to assert influence, so plans were made for a Palladian-style house, with hexastyle Corinthian portico, state rooms and expansive gardens (Sicca, 1991). The Marble entrance hall smacked of the Roman Temple of Justice, circulating an immediate sense of classical republicanism.

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<sup>7</sup> Via bribery, patronage or the possession of sinecures, in particular. The interpenetration of country and city is most usefully unpacked in Williams (1973).

<sup>8</sup> A certain orientation to landscape is presupposed here. Precisely because the virtuous gentleman could process the abstractions implicit in a generalized view (a panoramic vista over the surrounding area, for instance) indicated that he was fit to rule disinterestedly - that is, cognizant of the "broad view" (Barrell, 1986). The picturesque tradition is therefore intermeshed with the landowners political authority.



This was reinforced by the one hundred and five foot long statue gallery which contained



Figure 17: The marble entrance hall at Holkham, Norfolk

a series of classical sculptures - Diana, Thucydides and the statue of Marsyas. The fashion for covering walls with Italian cut velvet fitted well with the display of old masters, and Holkham's decorative arrangements were formative here (Clifford, 1982).<sup>9</sup> The Saloon, predictably, displayed a Rubens (*Return of the Holy Family*) and a Van Dyck (*the Duc d'Arenberg*), and in the Georgian period acted as a reception room for the State Apartments. The South Dining Room, in effect another state reception room, was home to "grand manner" portraits by Batoni, Gainsborough, two portraits in the style of Titian and Holbein, and a portrait of Sir Lionel Talmash by Sir Peter Lely. Finally, "the landscape room", which also functioned as a State Dressing Room, was decorated solely in seventeenth and eighteenth century Italianate landscapes by Poussin, Claude, Vernet and Rosa.

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<sup>9</sup> Obviously the decorative arrangements that pertain today in country houses do not necessarily reflect those at the time. In particular, pictures were seldom as individuated as they appear today. As well as the more "cluttered", aristocratic hang, the walls of English country houses were covered in fine textiles, fancy tassels, bows and decorative ornamentation that reinforced the overall splendour (Clifford, 1987).





Figure 18: The Saloon at Holkham Hall, containing Rubens' *Return of the Holy Family* and Van Dyck's *Duc d'Arenberg*



Figure 19: The South Dining Room at Holkham Hall, containing portraits of the 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Leicester by Batoni (figure 15) and Gainsborough

Though such displays were not targeted at a general public, what the country house did was contain and elicit the requisite aristocratic power to those that mattered - fellow dignitaries, M.Ps, landowners and nobles.<sup>10</sup> It is in this sense that the country house was “a show-case, in which to exhibit and entertain supporters and good connections” (Girouard, 1978: 3), and the collection a “triumphant act of enclosure” (Pears, 1988: 180) for a republic of taste. Such aristocratic collections, therefore, were not hermetic units of private delectation, for that would defeat the object of display. The eighteenth century English country house collection, as Duncan (1995) argues, fell in between the

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<sup>10</sup> The difficulties of gaining access to these collections were partly practical (transportation, obtaining appointments, getting past the English domestic servant), but also intentional - hence the proscription of correct dress, a fee and the desire to invite only “persons of the first rank, to first rate connoisseurs and first rate artists”, as the Earl of Stafford put it as late as 1806 (cited in Pears, 1988: 178). Other aristocratic collections of the second half of eighteenth century included that of Charles Lennox, Duke of Richmond (1735-1806), whose visit to Italy in 1758, yielded a collection of paintings, classical sculpture and casts, to be viewed by friends and scholars; and the collection of almost two hundred works - mainly seventeenth century Italianate Dutch and Flemish pictures sourced from the London art market - owned by the Earl of Egremont (1710-1763).

private and public realms, its rationale reinforced by the formation of other collections in similar spaces, such as the British museum.<sup>11</sup>

Despite some differences in style and function (products of varying social histories) the aristocratic collection, therefore, acted in a similar register to those evident in “enlightened” Europe at the same time. At the very least, the ideal public was the same: that constituency of propertied men, the educated and the influential, who comprised civil society during the eighteenth century. Collecting, displaying and viewing certain forms of art (old, foreign, grand manner) was one way in which these “men of taste” distinguished themselves from the older vestiges of absolutism and the lowly pleasures of the popular (who might also comprise the *parvenu*). All of which reinserted art into a space of tension between the realms of the visible: the affirmation of art-as-wealth, and the invisible: of art as index of taste, connoisseurship and moral worth.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, it was this tension, between (de)privation/extravagance and nationalization that grounded debates over national art galleries in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For now, however, England’s landed oligarchy had no obvious reason to form a national collection. As Duncan writes, “Their existing practices of collection and display already marked out boundaries of viable power and reinforced the authority of state offices” (Duncan, 1995: 39-40).

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<sup>11</sup> The British museum originated in the disparate private collections of Sir Hans Sloane, President of the Royal Society. Its incorporation in 1753, for many, is the foundation of national museums in Britain. Like the country house collection, however, this collection remained a select space for the amateur gentleman and free entry was only granted in 1810. Prime Minister Walpole was a reticent trustee, but state funds were not given for its purchase - a “national lottery” instead being held (Saumarez Smith, 1989; Mordaunt Crook, 1972). Although the nuanced distinctions between art and non-art were yet fully developed, the British Museum did not aim to contain paintings and sculpture beyond those that illuminated aspects of natural history or science. Its origins lay, therefore, with the cabinet of curiosities rather than the picture gallery.

<sup>12</sup> Not merely conspicuous display, then, art indexed a realm of discernment that “classified the classifier”. “It seems reasonable to suppose”, writes Pears, “that the collection of paintings demonstrated more than simple wealth, that spending money on art was a cautious choice with a specific purpose behind it” (Pears, 1988: 161).

## **D: The State, Art and England's National Gallery in the Early Nineteenth Century**

The state of Britain and the British state were gradually changing, however. Growing pacts between landed, commercial and industrial forces in early nineteenth century England served to drive a wedge between the practices of "Old Corruption", outmoded remnants of grandeur and inefficiency, and the modern stratum of "bourgeois" preparing to govern. At least, the elaboration of a system of rule emerged in contradistinction to privilege, landed oligarchy and populist forms of revolution and resistance to commercial change, such as Luddism (Thompson, 1978). This inflection in English social development was marked by greater adherence to ideas of "nation" and the broadening of citizenship and political influence to those locked out of power in the Georgian period. The Great Reform Act of 1832 was the most dramatic expression of this inflection, extending the franchise to propertied middle-class males. And though cultural institutions can not be read as mere reflections of these changes (the national gallery did not suddenly rise as a "bourgeois enclave"), certainly the context that circumscribed their possibilities was an important influence on the trajectory of such institutions.<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, the early nineteenth century was a crucial period of modernisation in England's art field as a whole (Rosenthal, 1992). To start with, the insertion of art into a commercial market encouraged by institutions such as the London Art Union, had helped to free artists from aesthetic directives and aristocratic demands (King, 1985). Commercialisation, in other words, had paradoxically produced a more open space of practice in which a less "elevated" bourgeois taste could proliferate. Academy exhibitions were, as a result, caught between the authority of the market (dependent on public taste) and the ideology of professional autonomy, though signs were that the former was gradually winning out (Trodd, 1997). A greater variety of styles - from the regal to the domestic - was apparent in portraiture, and the emphasis on informality and the attempt to convey individuality through character was present in both Ramsay and Lawrence. Genre painters such as Wilkie, Morland and Wheatley were in greater demand, feeding

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<sup>13</sup> Bourdieu's elaboration of the "prismatic effect" of (cultural) fields points up the importance of recognising the complex process of mediation that must be central to any analysis of culture (see Bourdieu, 1993).



off and into public taste for simple, domestic scenes and idealised images of the “virtuous poor”. They could also elevate the style, however, to suit grander patrons, as was the case with Wilkie’s *Village Politicians*.<sup>14</sup>



Figure 20: David Wilkie, *The Village Politicians*, 1806

As for landscape painting, which had been dominant up to the 1830s, a similar “break with tradition” (Gombrich, 1972: 394) to that of portraiture is apparent in the shift from the generalised Italianate scenes of the Augustan age, towards a more local set of references that congealed a modern sense of national identity in the work of Constable and Turner. Indeed, the latter’s “dialogue” with the Napoleonic wars produced the century’s most evocative images of a bountiful, stable and self-sufficient England at a time when the Continent was blockaded.

Clearly, public taste had begun to dissolve the associations of art with aristocratic living. The dominant ideal of history painting was an increasingly isolated one, for public support would rarely now be given for such large-scale undertakings. Moreover, while

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<sup>14</sup> Here, potentially “vulgar” and risky subjects such as bribery, politics and drinking amongst the lower classes were tempered by Wilkie’s allusion to seventeenth century Dutch genre painting. In any case, a certain acceptance of the dark and lowly ways of genre had been prefigured both by Hogarth and Joseph of Wright of Derby late in the eighteenth century. The latter’s candlelit scenes of industrial and scientific life, whilst provincialised (by the Academy) were lauded by members of an emerging bourgeois civil society (Birmingham’s Lunar Society for instance) and Wright survived comfortably in a flourishing urban arts system.



the patches and threads of civic humanism were still embroidered in artistic production and criticism, this discourse was increasingly marginalised. The hierarchy of artistic forms and the model of artistic content that were proposed within it were distant from the predominant conditions of artistic production in this period (Copley: 1992: 15). What had been a dominant lexicon of judgment and taste had, in fact, been long chipped away by Addisonian notions of politeness, enlightenment precepts of truth and the realm of commercial exchange (Solkin, 1992).

Connoisseurship, instead, was coming to be defined in a space delimited not by the amateur ramblings of the leisured gentleman, but by radical parliamentarians, professional critics and artists. It is perhaps too early to call this the affirmation of a “pure aesthetic”, as artistic justifications for art were often laid at the door of improvements to commerce, design and manufacturing. Yet the trend towards hiving off art into a more unique sphere of value was clearly a strategy used to differentiate modern bourgeois professionals from older aristocratic elites in the early nineteenth century. In particular, the regular employment of art historical schema to understand artistic style and quality was a characteristic of influential groups such as artists and intellectuals. Taste for such factions was fully dependent on specialist knowledge, professional judgment and artistic expertise, not mere possession.

In effect, the call for national spaces for art in England tapped into, but also thickened these complex processes of class formation and artistic distinction. From the 1820s and 30s, in particular, movement towards the foundation of a *national* gallery was part of the more widespread process of identity formation and the accruing of symbolic power amongst England’s bloc of bourgeois. Central to this was the effort to redefine and control spaces of art and aspects of art classification in distinction to those that characterised older spaces like country houses. The widening of public access, in particular, was a rhetorical device used by bourgeois elites, mediated through committees and campaign groups and legitimated by a state, to heighten the symbolic significance of such spaces.

This is not to say, however, that the transference of private property into public art was without conflict or adjustment. As argued in chapter two national art galleries did

not spring fully-formed from the neat chapters of history; and this is particularly so for the National Gallery. For a start, the government was still very unwilling to sponsor national cultural projects and artistic ventures in the early nineteenth century. The graven reliance on private sponsorship and decentralised forms of patronage marked itself in institutions such as the Royal Academy, whose defence of autonomy was guaranteed by its unique fusion of aristocratic power, royal assent and the public market.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, the British Institution for Promoting the Fine Arts in the United Kingdom - an exclusive gentlemen's club of self-financing patrons and aristocratic collectors of the old masters - operated outwith the parameters of government, enabling patricians to shape the growth of British art without conceding a national gallery (construed as a threat to private ownership) (Funnell, 1992). Further, the state in this post-Napoleonic moment had administrative and financial limitations which paralysed cultural sponsorship (Minihan, 1977). Finally, as Colley (1992) argues, the sponsorship of unbridled forms of national patriotism could easily become hijacked by over-inclusive notions of political community and a corresponding extension of the franchise. So, caution amongst the traditional guardians of government and patronage signified an entrenched position of aristocratic authority.<sup>16</sup>

On the other hand, the art world in England cannot be understood apart from the state's involvement, just as with industry, welfare or leisure (Pearson, 1982). State regulation of cultural forms and the channeling of national identity was not monolithic,

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<sup>15</sup> The strength of the Academy was a decisive factor in the way the art field developed in Britain. Subject to the most virulent complaints of reformers and centre of all the most dramatic cultural altercations of the century, the Academy still managed to retain hegemonic status as champion of "pure art" and host to the most talked about exhibitions in the capital. Its collective ideological struggle to define the "artist-as-creator" concentrated trends towards artistic autonomy that suggested a final rupture with heteronomous relations of patronage (Fyfe, 1986; Bourdieu, 1993). For these reasons, and its association with the monarchy, the Academy was usually able to resist the demands for accountability aimed at it by parliament from the 1830s.

<sup>16</sup> Focus on this dimension of state inactivity informs the view of those who see substantial gaps between English and continental models of state-art relations. Funnell writes, for instance: "We can see how wide the gulf was between those foreign art worlds, funded and regulated by the state, and the institutional structure prevailing in London" (Funnell, 1992: 156). See also Solkin (1992) and Minihan (1977).

but it was present.<sup>17</sup> This was particularly so from the first two or three decades of the nineteenth century, as government became increasingly receptive to the actions of voluntary and philanthropic groups in English civil society and the attendant cultural strategy of opening up privileged spaces under the aegis of the “nation” (Duncan, 1995). In other words, as the state came to define acceptable forms and images of social activity in general - normalising and regulating the limits of economy, culture and politics - so it began to construct a “nineteenth century state art apparatus” (Corrigan and Sayer, 1985; Fyfe, 1993). This apparatus consisted of museums, academies, art schools and national collections that, in effect, classified and marshaled art, by shaping artistic identities and policing artistic boundaries.

If the success of French and Italian Schools of Painting could be improved with state encouragement, then so could the “British School”, it was reasoned. Programmes of state sponsorship shaded very heavily into nationalist rivalry, giving an edge to projects such as the decoration of the Houses of Parliament, rebuilt after the fire of 1834 and the “acquisition” of the “Elgin marbles” in 1816. Equally, a form of English romanticism with revised hopes of melding nationalism with individualism had growing support amongst artist-intellectuals such as Hazlitt and poets such as Wordsworth and Blake (the other “autonomous pole” of English romanticism was, of course, vehemently opposed to imperialist promulgations and expressed elements of the unbridled in a poetry of interiority).

English nationalism, then, took a similar hue to those in other western European nations; it grew from an understanding of political rationality and national community that articulated the interests of civil society to the state. Benthamite groups were

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<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the operation of more nuanced forms of guidance may have been a more effective strategy. The state was, therefore, more influential in the arts than is sometimes registered (Solkin, 1992; Funnell, 1992). At the very least, it operated a “mixed cultural economy” stance, combining “arms length” principles that encouraged the founding of “quangos” (the Royal Academy for example), with protection and guidance. Its incursions were particularly evident in order to curb monarchical and aristocratic expenditure (as was the case at times with the Royal Academy). But it was also evident when aristocratic exclusivity gave away to greater bourgeois, and in the case of design, working class, exposure; when art was reaching a wider audience; and when struggles or conflicts in the art world itself began to spill over into the public sphere (Fyfe, 1993; Minihan, 1977).

significant players in this strategy, calling for an end to privilege, widening political inclusion and defending the imperatives of national-state improvement (the state, here, not as something to be disciplined but inhabited in order to guarantee freedoms). Parliament's purchase, in 1824, of John Julius Angerstein's collection of thirty-eight old masters was a significant step in this path towards state-regulation, international brinkmanship and class conflict. The collection included works by Raphael, Titian, Claude, Rubens, Rembrandt, Reynolds and Hogarth, and was purchased, after much bargaining on Lord Liverpool's side, at a "cut-price" of £57,000 (Denvir, 1984).

Angerstein, a Russian émigré and founder of Lloyds of London, represented the modern flavour of mercantile capitalism and philanthropy.<sup>18</sup> He was part of a growing breed of non-aristocratic patrons (like Henry Tate) who shaped the nineteenth century art field by supporting national art and fostering a growing middle class public, but who were often excluded, as *arrivistes*, from the higher reaches of elite society.<sup>19</sup> Even before his death in 1832 Angerstein had allowed artists and writers access to his collection at Pall Mall and spoke of his willingness to donate part of this to the nation. Similar offers had, in fact, been made earlier in the century by the likes of Noel Desenfans and Sir George Beaumont. The latter's promise of 1823 to donate his collection as soon as government provided proper house-room for it, was a factor in Lord Liverpool's sanction of the Angerstein purchase itself.<sup>20</sup> For now, however, not even the Angerstein collection

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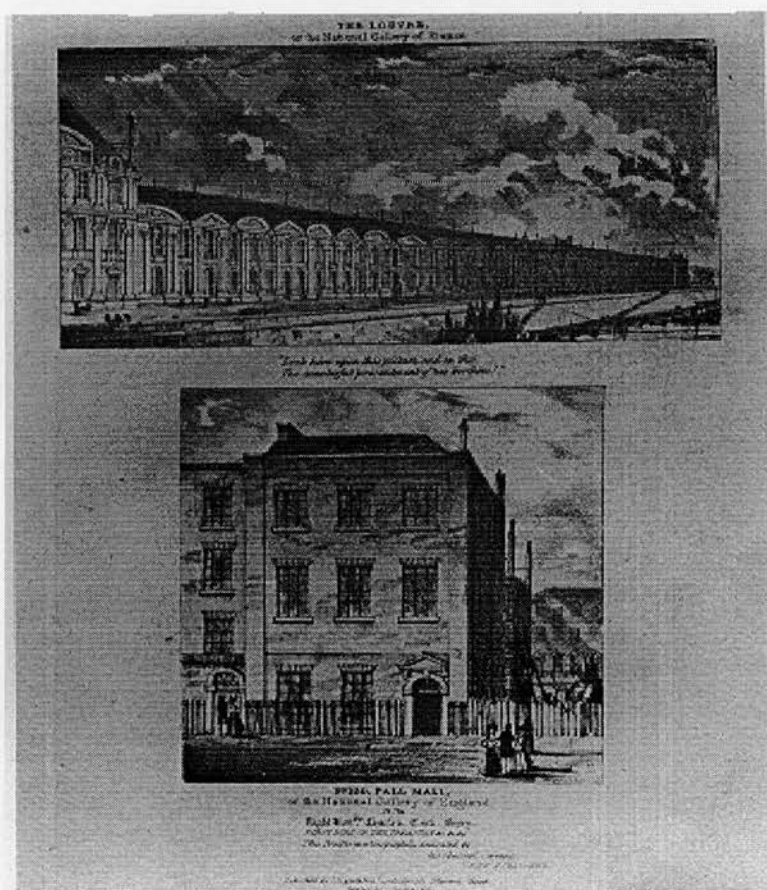
<sup>18</sup> Indeed his reproach to the landed aristocracy as unpatriotic spendthrifts revealed in his list of the nation's most generous sponsors of a British fund for deceased servicemen, was at the same time an articulation of bourgeois modernity (Duncan, 1995).

<sup>19</sup> That Angerstein himself felt himself socially marginalised in some circles is indicated by Farrington's assessment that "Mr Angerstein...is much respected for his good heart and intentions but is considered defficient in Education, & very embarrassed on all occasions when He is required to express himself...[he] might have been at the head of popularity *in the City*, but has chosen to associate chiefly at the west end of town" (cited in Funnell, 1992: 158).

<sup>20</sup> Desenfans, a French picture dealer offered his collection of old masters to the British government at the end of the century; this was declined. Instead he began to build up a personal collection with Sir Francis Bourgeois and called for the constitution of a national gallery in England, where artists could study the old masters. In 1799 he even produced a plan for building such a gallery at no public expense, but this was ignored by government. Instead, on his death, the collection was bequeathed to Bourgeois on the condition that it should be exhibited and preserved to the public. The pictures formed the core to the collection at Dulwich College, and



was to be given a dedicated gallery. Instead the paintings were to be kept and displayed at Angerstein's own house on the government's purchase of the lease.



**Figure 21: Lithograph of c. 1830 contrasting the Louvre with the gallery at Pall Mall**

The “gallery” opened to the public in May 1824 on four days a week, under the administration of the keeper William Seguer and a “Committee of Gentlemen” including Lord Liverpool, Lord Aberdeen, Sir Charles Long, Sir George Beaumont and Sir Thomas Lawrence (Trodd, 1994). That it remained under aristocratic directorship was apt given the legacy of patrician culture. As an expression of national expertise and artistic worth, however, the gallery’s mode of operation was increasingly unacceptable to radicals and reformers. In response to demands for a new gallery, key members of the committee commissioned architects such as Nash, Cockerell and Wilkins to provide plans

then to the picture gallery itself, opened in 1821 (Dulwich Picture Gallery Catalogue, n.d.).

for a new site and building. In 1832 Sir Robert Peel presented to parliament plans for a neo-classical building at Trafalgar Square, designed by Wilkins and dedicated solely to picture collections. The motion was carried and £43,000 voted for its establishment, although this estimate had already crept up to £76,000 by 1833.

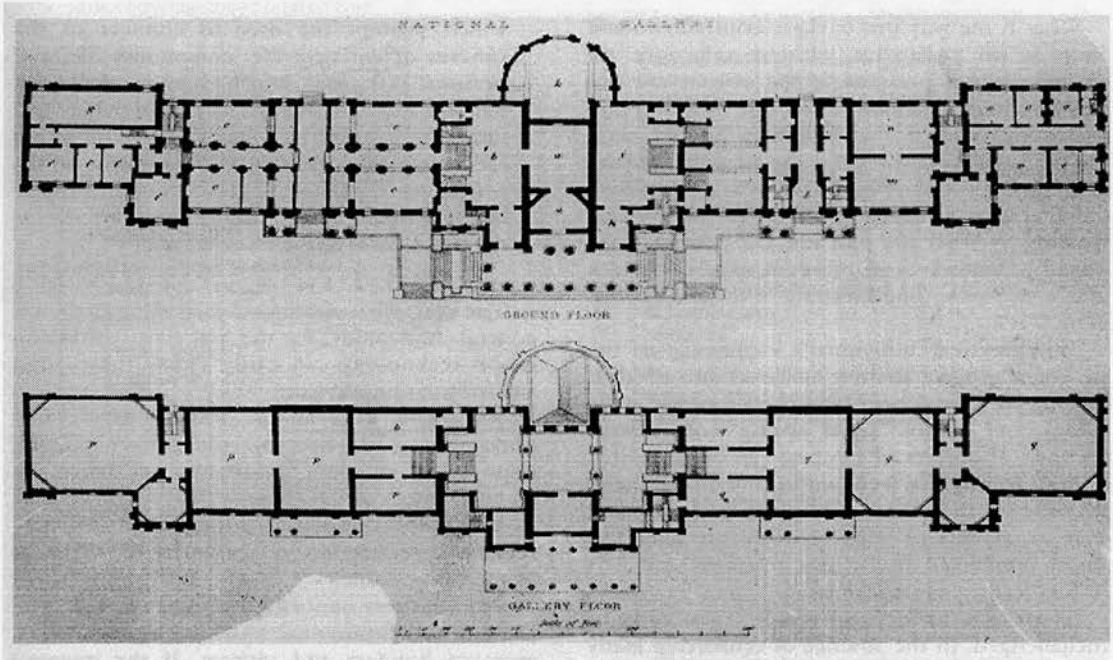


Figure 22: Wilkins' National Gallery, 1831-38

Still, disciplining middle class radicals were far from satisfied with these arrangements - a feeling exacerbated by the news that the building was to be shared between the national collection and the Royal Academy. This added to the confused mix of public, national ideal and private, aristocratic culture and led to charges of elite monopolisation and administrative incompetence (Funnell, 1992). The *Literary Gazette's* vitriol of 1833 ran, for instance:

We lament it on account of the bad effect it must have on every patriotic man, who might, under better auspices, be inclined to enrich the National Collection by gifts of private munificence, but who will not bestow treasures on an inadequate institution, half gallery, half academy, half public, half chartered, half civil, half military, half wealthy, half pauper, half barbarous, half Grecian, half Gothic, and altogether incompetent and ridiculous. (*Literary Gazette*, Issue 14, September 1833, reprinted in Denvir, 1984: 184)

Again, the push for greater attention to the question of national improvement and art was made by progressives, radicals and reformers, some of whom had been voted into power

after 1832. The upshot was widened parliamentary scrutiny of national institutions of art and the 1835-36 Select Committees of the House of Commons.

These Committees were co-ordinated by renowned radicals such as Thomas Wyse and William Ewart to gauge the best means of educating “artisans” in order to improve the quality of design for Britain’s manufacturing goods and to assess the formation of public collections in Britain. Its remit was, therefore, dualistic: education, design and manufacturing, on the one hand, fine arts and the role of the Royal Academy on the other, even if both were united under the rhetoric of “national improvement”. Indeed, it would be safe to say that the resolution of one set of questions led straight to the Great Exhibition, national schools of art and design and the formation of the South Kensington complex of museums, the other to a professionalisation of the National Gallery.<sup>21</sup> In both cases, as Duncan writes, “Its members...were equally intent on uncovering the ineptitude of the privileged gentlemen to whom the nation’s cultural institutions were entrusted” (1995: 43).

Inasmuch as national galleries in Europe were heralded as tools of national improvement and social order, the Select Committee was disposed to find ways of modernizing London’s gallery for the sake of “public education”. Testimony had been taken on the utilitarian dimension of the arts, for instance, and the importance of free admission. Wyse, together with M.Ps such as Joseph Hume, were vociferous champions of free public access to all institutions in Britain which contained important artistic works (including the Royal Academy, which charged one shilling for entry). Underlying such calls was a pointed critique of previous regimes of privation and the selfish culture of aristocracy. Only when power had been wrenched from this constituency, declared Wyse, could the nation enjoy the benefits of civilization:

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<sup>21</sup> This split is noticeable, for instance, in the structure of art education in Britain. While the state leaves the Royal Academy a substantial degree of control over “pure art”, a “second level” system of education is set up in response to the requirements of industrial capitalism - to produce design cognizant technicians and raise public taste (as a moral not aesthetic category). State sponsored schools of design were set up from the 1830s on the back of proposals of the 1835 Select Committee. Henry Cole, co-organiser of the Great Exhibition took over this system in the late 1840s, embracing a more general notion of public art education (Pearson, 1982).

Rich we may be, strong we may be; but without our share in the literary and artistic as well as scientific progress of the age, our civilisation is incomplete. (Wyse, cited in Duncan, 1995: 44)

The Select Committee took testimony from some of the most enlightened museological figures in Europe (such as Dr Waagen and Baron von Klenze) in order to throw older practices into disrepute and to signify the desire to professionalize. The gallery was, indeed, revealed to be in a sorry state - outmoded, inefficient and failing to live up to its status as "national". Certainly compared to arrangements at the Louvre, and the museums of Munich, Berlin and Madrid, England's national gallery was behind the times. In 1835 the collection amounted to one hundred and twenty six pictures, for instance; and even this stretched the available space (the lion's share of which, on Wilkins' admission, and much to the dismay of Ewart, had been given to the Royal Academy) (King, 1985). As the Select Committee explained, in order to fully distinguish itself from the private collections of the past, the gallery had to be radically transformed. The collection had to be restructured, widened and hung in a way that did justice not to the private picture gallery but to modern principles of art history.

It was no good, said Waagen, for a national gallery to contain examples of the Caracci - favoured by gentlemen - but none from the early Renaissance art of Raphael. For works from the era of Raphael should always form the basis to ancient collections, declared the art critic. Clearly, "gentlemen of taste" were severely lacking in the kinds of professional techniques that were crucial to art history, here. The present keeper of the gallery, William Segulier had, in fact, revealed that no plans were in store for any re-arrangement of the collection into schools, a practice that had been employed by experts for almost a century in some parts of Europe (Bazin, 1967). Labels were a good idea, agreed the keeper, but again had not been installed. The acquisitions policy, while sufficiently wide enough to bring in a substantial number of works by minor artists, was over-loose and yet to be rationalised. As for institutional decision-making, Segulier expressed no knowledge of who appointed the building committee and how the trustees system operated. Woodburn spoke for many when he declared: "I can hardly call ours a national gallery" (cited in Duncan, 1995: 44).

Not long after Sir Charles Eastlake took over as keeper upon the death of Segulier



in 1843, the National Gallery was still shared by the academy and the national collection and still subject to parliamentary scrutiny (via committees in 1848 and 1853). In fact it took years of enforced modernization before the National Gallery was bought properly into line with models elsewhere (although as Duncan notes, it was never to be a “universal survey museum”). Even then, the system of trusteeship was often used as an aristocratic device to keep the gallery at “arm’s length” from the state. The significant point, though, is that a National Gallery, accountable ultimately to the state, guided by professional elites, and cognizant of “European fashions” was gradually founded in England’s metropolis. By 1855, the Treasury’s programme of modernization had, in fact, swept away many older administrative practices, and solidified communication between trustees, arts professionals and government.<sup>22</sup> The policy of acquiring works from the masters of the early Italian school now operated under Sir Charles Eastlake, who brought in works such as Guido’s *Ecce Homo*, Giorgione’s *Knight in Armour*, Botticelli’s *Adoration of the Magi* and Michelangelo’s *Madonna and Child with Angels* (at the time attributed to Ghirlandaio). Meanwhile, critics such as Ruskin were preparing a collection of Turner’s modern work to be exhibited at Marlborough House in 1858, eventually to be returned to the Trafalgar Square gallery in 1876 (Holmes and Baker, 1924).

Moreover, as with picture galleries elsewhere, the National Gallery in London became a symbolically-loaded space, cleansed at the behest of the bourgeoisie. For once defined as a space dedicated solely to the love of art, the gallery was marked by its function to contain objects of purity and to exclude both the anachronism of mere possession and, as far as possible, the disruptive forces of the “impure” and “vulgar”. “To attempt to draw distinctions between the objects for which admission was sought, to limit the right of admission on certain days might be impossible” admitted Sir Robert Peel, “but the impossibility is rather an argument against placing the pictures in the greatest thoroughfare of London the greatest confluence of the idle and unwashed” (cited in Trodd, 1994: 33). Only by maintaining spatial purity could the gallery circulate the requisite norms of civility and contemplation and resist the “filth” and “pollution” of the

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<sup>22</sup> The Director was required, for instance, to produce Annual Reports for public inspection; and in return, an annual purchase grant was promised.

lower class body (a point developed in chapter seven).

Peel's comments were not isolated. Cockerell, Unwins, Hurlstone and Waagen all commented on the "threat" of "low" practices to the sanctity of the gallery as a unit of artistic distinction (Trodd, 1994). Waagen's diatribe against wet nurses and "persons, whose filthy dress tainted the atmosphere with a most disagreeable smell", was matched by Unwins unease at the "lower classes of people" who came to the gallery on Mondays, but who "certainly do not seem to be interested at all about the pictures". Hurlstone's rhetorical question: "do you think there is any considerable portion of the working classes who go to the gallery for the purpose of visiting and looking at works of art?" was answered by Cockerell whose belief it was that art was not "compatible with the occupation of artisans, and the encouragement of it would mislead them and interfere with their proper callings, and right division of labour, in which excellence already requires all their ability. There is wide distinction between art and fine art; in the latter the knowledge of artisans whose bread is earned in laborious work must be always very limited, compared with those who have original genius for it" (all cited in Todd, 1994: 42, 45, 45, 46).

Clearly these statements return us to Bourdieu's thoughts on artistic distinction and "symbolic violence" (1983; 1984), but they also reveal residues of civic humanism in the discourses of nineteenth century art and governance, with its distrust of the bodily and material. Indeed, born of a mix of national, patrician, public and educational ideals, the gallery's guardians would be preoccupied with issues of access, distinction and exclusion for years to come. For such was the project of the "great arch" of bourgeois culture and the sediments of centuries laid therein.

## A CULTURE OF TURBULENCE: POLITICS AND VISUAL PRODUCTION IN EARLY MODERN SCOTLAND 1560-1760

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How, then, does the development of Scotland's national gallery fit in with the cases I have just presented? How do the historical trajectories of museum formation in Europe, England and Scotland compare and contrast? How does a fine art field develop in Scotland's capital? And what does this say about the relationship between Scotland's social structure and its visual arts?

Well, if England's journey to a mature fine art field was idiosyncratic and contrasted somewhat to continental Europe, the case of Scotland is slightly removed again. While sharing a similar socio-genesis to England, it would be a mistake to read off the emergence of art institutions in Edinburgh as a sub-phenomena of London. Certain conditions prevailed, at least in Scotland's capital, which call for investigation in themselves. The development of structures of artistic production and distribution in Edinburgh, in other words, demands investigation as a "relatively autonomous" case. A different chronological profile, historical base and set of social conditions identifies a model of cultural development that, though not radically divergent from the English case, does still point to important local differences.

The function of these next two chapters, then, is to provide some *general* historical comment on relations in modern and early modern Scotland between the production of visual artefacts and social conditions. As such, the chapters provide some pointers to the state of Scotland's visual culture and the forces operating for and against it from the Reformation to the Enlightenment. Ordered chronologically, the analysis concentrates on elements of social history that compare and contrast with certain aspects of the European and English models. The aim is not, therefore, to provide a comprehensive survey of visual cultural production in Scotland over three and a half centuries. Such a task lies beyond the scope of the present investigation. What I hope to

do is sketch some kind of historical backdrop to the more focused analysis that the second half of the thesis constitutes: to trace the lineage of early modern visual culture and its discontents in order to better understand what was “modern” about structures of artistic production in Scotland in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The narrative runs from the general to the particular and finishes with a comment on the state of artistic production at the point when the first *cultural catalyst* - the Enlightenment - had constructed a fertile civil society on which a more united, complex artistic field could grow.

Before this time, though, as continental Europe enjoyed the visual fruits that absolute monarchical power encouraged, and England slowly worked out the relations between official power, patronage and the market, Scotland was well-nigh paralysed by the spasms of conflict which belonged to an older system of social (dis)order.

### **A: The Early Modern Context I: 1560-1603**

For most of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Scotland was a poverty stricken, factioned and feudal kingdom blighted by famine, political turmoil and foreign invasion. As a result, before the mid eighteenth century, Scotland did not possess much in the way of talented indigenous artists, centralised units of patronage, or arenas where art could be used as a form of conspicuous display. More so than England, a unified court of regal display did not materialise in Scotland as the early manifestation and proto-model of high cultural display. And for a long time nothing resembling the princely gallery or centralised art patronage existed in Scotland.

The problem of artistic development lay with Scotland’s turbulent early modern history, implanted by 1540. The Reformation, under the vitriolic influence of Knox and, later, Melville, was a period of social upheaval that saw the vestiges of Catholic rule falter with Mary, Queen of Scots’ flight and imprisonment. On the basis of resistance to papal supremacy, Knox and Melville encouraged iconoclasm - the removal of objects of idolatry to religious figures - which, in effect, purged Scotland of many of its medieval Catholic decorative schemes and sculpture. Mary’s newly arranged chapel at Holyrood Palace, for instance, was destroyed by the Protestant Earl of Glencairn after her



disappearance in 1567; while in Perth the local population was so inflamed by Knox’s sermon against idolatry in 1559 that icons, windows and books were destroyed in the aftermath (Houston and Whyte, 1989). The “word”, in the form of the Old Testament, had begun to replace the “image” as the Catholic imagination had employed it, as Scotland declared its independence from Rome and dissolved its links with France. General neglect of Scotland’s cathedrals, abbeys and monasteries was clearly an important factor in the ruination of its visual heritage. But the pro-active destruction of cultural objects was another matter, and the old Catholic church crumbled under the force of a movement which found papacy and its accoutrements to be tyrannical and therefore intolerable. Some visual artefacts did survive, such as the Trinity College Church altarpiece, said to be commissioned by its provost, Sir Edward Bonkil by the Flemish painter Hugo van der Goes in the 1470s. But the Reformation decimated what had been created in previous centuries to an extent scarcely matched elsewhere in Europe (Macmillan, 1984a).

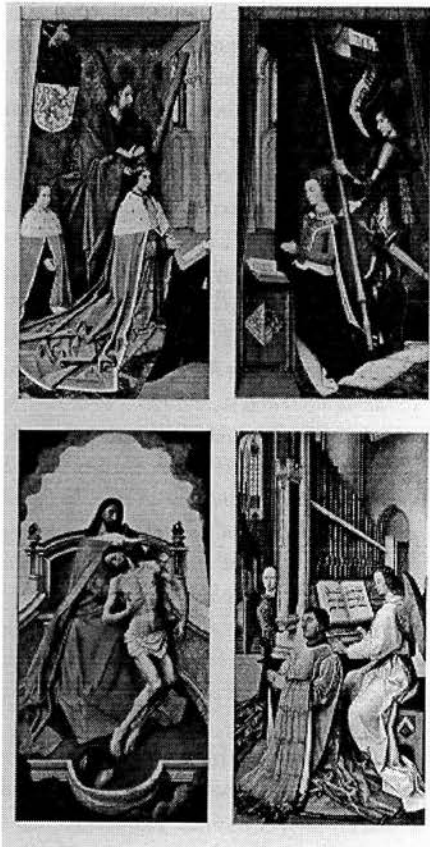


Figure 23: Hugo van der Goes , The Trinity Altarpiece, c. 1475-82

By the late sixteenth century, the social and cultural impact of the Reformation was felt at all levels of Scottish society. The “nurturing” effect of Scottish Puritanism was its encouragement of education and literacy, enabling children to read the Old Testament and learn the catechism. But strict Sabbatarianism, temperance and the suppression of sensuous expression generally was the Reformation’s most dramatic signature. Apart from the destruction of religious imagery, the reformed church was active in stifling other forms of emotive display such as music, dance, literature and theatre. Only plain metrical psalms were heard in the sparsely decorated churches of the Kirk and the Reformation plays of Hammerman in Perth and Edinburgh were banned in the 1570s and 80s, on the grounds that they smacked of Popery (Houston and Whyte, 1989).

A similar barrier to a flourishing world of cultural display rested on the slippery bedrock of early modern Scottish politics and economy. Financially, Scotland faced a series of obstacles to stability, and despite some fertile contacts with the Low Countries, political upheaval had disjointed burgh trade. In contrast to its southern neighbour, Scotland, with a population of only seven or eight thousand in the late sixteenth century, was a tense, disparate and vacillating region that, for Mitchison (1983) at least, resembled the less advanced parts of Europe such as Poland, Portugal and Ireland. A characteristic problem was the power vacuum left after Mary’s imprisonment and subsequent execution. Consistently, this was filled by various powerful nobles with putative connections to royalty, and the civil war that raged between the newly crowned James VI’s loyalists and those of the Queen compounded the sense of political uncertainty. Accordingly, parliaments of the 1570s switched constantly between vying factions. Edinburgh itself was split in two until the fall of the Catholic held castle in 1573. James VI was crowned as an infant in 1567, but for the time being, the Earl of Morton led the government under a Protestant Royalist regime, seeing in a period of short-lived regencies as ancient scores were settled. Complex systems of allegiance continued to characterise the early modern period as the Kirk, in the guise of the General Assembly, stood against the state and the king’s loyalists for power. Indeed, royal power was always tentative in early modern Scotland, and attempts to physically co-opt the king were not uncommon.

With respect to administrative government, the Scottish parliament was not a powerful institution, unlike its English counterpart. The poorly financed monarchy found it difficult to retain control against the feudal power base of the aristocracy. During the sixteenth century, for instance, this latter faction dominated the Privy Council, the unicameral parliament and conventions. Royal governance was constantly challenged by private armies raised in defence of land and heritable rights. In short, none of the administrative bodies seemed capable of residing definitively over political affairs. To this extent, the blurred institutional edges of the Scottish polity, in which the church and the state remained for long periods at loggerheads, fostered in Scotland less centralised or absolutist mechanisms of power to those operative on the continent.<sup>1</sup> At a time when the working out of the balance between old feudal regalities and a more modern state structure of laws and taxation characterised the actions of European polities, Scotland was well-nigh paralysed by social and political dislocation. As a result, Edinburgh, despite Holyrood Palace, which for several centuries was to be constantly sacked, refurbished and sacked again, had little in the way of official seats of central power and authority by the sixteenth century. As McKean (1991) asserts, before the early seventeenth century, the city was, in effect, a civic burgh rather than a flourishing capital, with few spaces for royal or national ceremony. Some of the Stewart monarchs had attempted to use Holyrood as a centre for royal entertainment. James V, for instance, employed poets and tutors in the early sixteenth century and turned Holyrood into a palace, with ornate decorative tapestries. But Holyrood remained, first and foremost, a dwelling place that lacked the finery of a royal court. Further, Parliament met in the relatively diminutive Tollbooth in the sixteenth century until Charles I later compelled the capital to pay for the construction of a new Parliament House on the site of St. Giles.

In a context such as this, visual culture was unable to take root in the capital in

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed, theological resistance to absolutism, tyranny and royal power was a constant theme in Protestant political thought for some time. George Buchanan, for instance, was advisor to James VI and a staunch supporter of the ideals of popular sovereignty and the principle of *Vius Regni* (limited monarchical rule). His edicts against tyranny were not fully endorsed by the king, but they clearly stood for a popular current of feeling that resented the abuses of unchecked kingship and ignorance of the principles of Presbyterian morality (Mason, 1982).

a way that would provide a rich tradition for future generations. For a long while, Edinburgh's craftsmen were drawn from the Low Countries and were relatively limited in visual output. Without the attraction of a lucrative court or centralised patronage, few artists of quality ventured north. Native work tended to arise out of commissions for heraldic walls or ceilings. Some ceremonial and armorial work is in evidence in a few houses and castles, particularly in the north-east.<sup>2</sup> Keen to establish a visual document of historical legitimation, the nobility commissioned coats of arms and banners for their dwellings (Holloway, 1989). And the government of James VI in Scotland had developed new images of kingship as part of an advanced visual propaganda machine that forged an "iconography of kingship" in the 1590s. To promote emotional attachment, James VI was variously depicted on coins, seals and portraits as Solomon the Wise and, after the Union of the Crowns, Brutus, Britain's unifier. In fact, portraiture was a medium that was to be dominant in Scotland's for centuries to come. However, in the early modern period, portraitists were Netherlandish men such as van Son and Bronckhorst. The former was the leading painter at court until 1601, but his output was small and often unrewarded (Thompson, 1975). Things only scarcely improved in the seventeenth century.



Figure 24: *James VI and I*,  
Adrian van Son, 1595

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<sup>2</sup> Aberdeen appears to have escaped some of the worst attacks of Puritan iconoclasm; its relative political stability in relation to Edinburgh, as well as its close commercial links with the Low Countries ensured a more creative sphere of craft and visual culture. Some of Aberdeen's Catholic heritage remained intact for longer than that of the Lowlands. The adornments of the church of Old Machar, for instance, were destroyed almost a century after similar adornments further south (Macmillan, 1990).



## **B: The Early Modern Context II: 1603-1707**

The question over whether Scotland produced a Baroque art of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries seems to be a slightly misguided one. As Macmillan (1984a) notes, the question is framed within the perspective of those countries of catholic southern Europe that experienced the Renaissance. Such a paradigm over-determines models of art history, argues Macmillan, when what should be attempted is a more nuanced cultural history which recognises alternative trends in northern Europe. From this perspective, Scotland's cultural profile should be matched with that of Scandinavia and the Low Countries not of France, Italy and Spain. Scotland was never likely to produce ornate buildings, forms of courtly display or Grand Manner paintings. Its Protestantism shaped culture into more austere forms with an emphasis on private or domestic restraint rather than public display. Furthermore, Scotland's stricken economy, its political factionalism and cultural uncertainty, militated against unified, powerful and complex systems of patronage and visual form. Some architectural schemes and paintings of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries give a vague sense of Continental influence. But the social, economic and political situation was way too unsettled for a court style to grow. In its place, a more fragmented and circumspect culture emerged from the chaos of Caroline society, only rarely showing evidence of visual display, a flowering market, consistent patronage, and public recognition.

Still, it would be a mistake not to acknowledge *some* development in Scotland's cultural institutions and forms in the seventeenth century. Indeed, Scotland's links with the remarkable seventeenth century Dutch republic had inspired some improvement in the quality and quantity of architecture and visual design in general (Holloway, 1990). Institutional links with the universities of Leyden and Utrecht delivered profound improvements to the medical, legal and theological faculties in Scotland's major universities, forming the bedrock for later "enlightened" progress in the discourses of science, law, art and the humanities (Smout, 1969). Urban merchants and craftsmen, further, exploited international trade in Norway, Belgium and Denmark, encouraging the import of a cosmopolitan range of goods. Indeed, the nobility and aristocracy in Scotland were demanding a panoply of specialised luxury goods by the seventeenth century, as the

excesses of feudalism slowly gave way to the more “refined” manners of European-style aristocracy - of gentile and controlled hospitality:

The paintings, fine silver tableware and cutlery, good quality Dutch linen, imported beds and English chairs which had been coming into the houses in the reign of Charles I now became increasingly common. Perhaps because money incomes were so largely replacing rents in kind, they were buying with the magpie instincts of modern households instead of merely giving way to intermittent bouts of gluttony (Smout, 1969: 134).<sup>3</sup>

One way in which this shift from the traditional elite lifestyle was secured was through the building of fashionable country houses, replacing the old defenceable castles of feudalism. The reconstruction of the likes of Crichton Castle and the building of Seton Palace, Thirlestane House (for the Duke of Lauderdale) and Fyvie Castle in Aberdeenshire, with their formal gardens, decorative tapestries and baronial halls, was clearly aimed at impressing official visitors.<sup>4</sup> In the major Scottish burghs, too, the old medieval rigs were swept away and newer town houses with courtyards were built to contemporary continental taste. In Edinburgh, the Canongate remained the area where aristocrats clustered, living in hotels (Moray House, for instance), Italian villas and mansions. Holyrood itself was improved for Charles I’s coronation in 1633, as Edinburgh finally lived up to its status as capital - proud owner of a new parliament square, civic centre and George Heriot’s hospital.

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<sup>3</sup> Smout (1969) recognises this as part of what Elias has termed the “civilisation process” in relation to an emerging elite conduct of introspection, commercial improvement and corporeal restraint. The shift away from the archaic values of feudalism (warfare, loyalty, natural law) was slow, but gained momentum by the eighteenth century with the genesis of civil society, as argued below.

<sup>4</sup> Sir William Bruce was the architect of many of these seats of patrician civility, building in a classical fashion for the Lords, Marquesses and Earls of Scotland. Bruce translated the classicism of Palladio and Inigo Jones, with their big windows and sumptuous interiors, into the Scottish context, setting in motion architectural achievements that far outweighed that of other visual arts in Scotland.

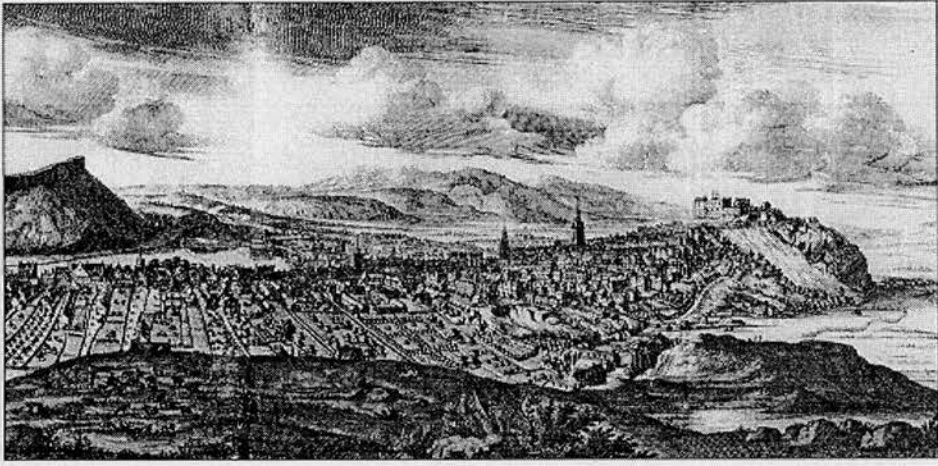


Figure 25: *Edinburgh From Calton Hill*, c. 1680 drawn by John Slezer

Urban improvements were equally evident with the birth of a printing press in the city, which widened and secularised written culture in the guise of acts of law, propaganda, images of the king and national histories. The Grand Tour had begun to pull Edinburgh's young aristocrats to France, as well as to the universities in the Dutch Republic. The capital's professional strata were leading in matters beyond the legal sphere, providing cultural and intellectual leadership that was to snowball in the next century. And Scottish theologians were central to intellectual developments in Protestant doctrine, setting up Presbyteries and systems of religious education in northern Europe. Finally, the autochthonous poems and ballads of seventeenth century Scottish folk culture were beginning to find favour with higher constituencies in Scottish society - a trend towards cultural appropriation that was to reach a peak in the romantic period.

As far as seventeenth century visual culture is concerned, it is evident that some improvements were made in the quantity and quality of painting. Decorative painters were actively adorning ceilings, halls, and galleries with figure imagery, Christian myths and classical patterns. At Huntly Castle, for instance, the chapel was adorned with "parables and other sacred subjects" (Thompson, 1975: 13) by John Anderson, for the Marquess of Huntly in 1617. Other patrons for this type of work ranged from merchants to the great magnates. Examples have been found along the east coast (Aberdeen and Edinburgh, in particular), where decorative schools sprung more readily. It was from this context that the Scotsman George Jamesone emerged, one of the more prolific artists of

the seventeenth century. Jamesone was infamously labelled the “Scottish Van Dyck” by the collector and connoisseur, Horace Walpole. He found a market for portraits among local aristocrats in Edinburgh, and attempted Grand Manner portraits in the court style, as well as more intimate portraits for mementos and family trees. By the end of the 1620s Jamesone was carrying out full-lengths of the Earl and Countess of Rothes and portraits of Countess Marischal, the Earl of Montrose and Lord Melrose. These were influenced by the prevailing London court style (of Gheeraerts and Van Somer), but which, according to Thompson (1975), lacked the technical expertise of these painters.



Figure 26: *Mary Erskine, Countess Marischal*,  
George Jamesone, 1626

Jamesone's most infamous commission, however, was the series of one hundred and nine painted kings which decorated the triumphal arch at Tollbooth to coincide with Charles I's visit to Edinburgh, in 1633. Depicting an imaginary lineage of Scottish kings, including Robert the Bruce, the scheme helped to reinforce the antiquity and historical legitimization of Charles I's claim to the throne. Fifty years later, Jamesone's mythical genealogy was to be used as the model for another attempt at an iconography of kingship



in the gallery at Holyrood, this time by the Dutchman, De Wet.<sup>5</sup> Holyrood was rebuilt by Sir William Bruce from 1671 for Charles II in ceremonial style, with panelling in oak, ornate chimney pieces, and a long line of state rooms decorated with a cycle of portraits by De Wet.

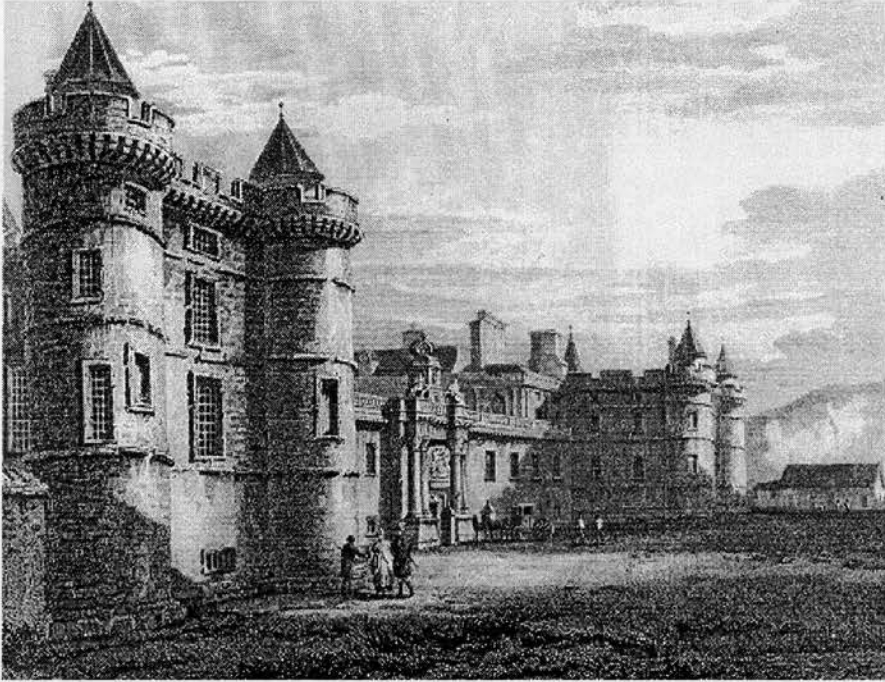


Figure 27: The Palace of Holyroodhouse, as rebuilt by Sir William Bruce, Drawn by Thomas Hearne, 1779

Similar to some of the iconographic schemes of the great European galleries mentioned in chapter two, this disposition secured the Restoration king, Charles II, within the imagined national lineage of ancestral kings. In contrast to the Continental baroque glorification of individual monarchs, however, the key to this scheme was the representation of a linear succession of kings. As Bruce and Yearley (1989) show, the Stewart kings circulated symbols of national mythology such as coins, genealogies and portraits in order to furnish an ancient and respectable history for themselves in the wake of the civil war. From 1684-86 Jacob De Wet painted one hundred and ten “Scottish monarchs” from the founders and warlords of early Scotland, to the Stewarts of the

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<sup>5</sup> Jamesone’s influence also spread through his pupil, Michael Wright, a London born artist who painted the nobility in Scotland, including the 4th Earl of Haddington and the architect Sir William Bruce, in the 1640s. Wright later returned to England to rival Sir Peter Lely as Restoration court artist.

seventeenth century. The purpose was to visually represent a smooth dynastic continuity of Scottish monarchs (when, in fact, the lineage was anything but smooth), and to express the natural claim of the present monarch. As James had died during the commission, Charles II was added as the present inheritor of royal Scottish kingship:

Although at one level the paintings merely represent the traditional history of the Scottish throne, the detailed form they take stands as an innovative and deliberate act of propaganda. In their style and arrangement, in the successions they imply, in the choice of monarchs to be emphasised, and in the anachronistic details, the portraits exhibit a commitment to and an argument for royalism (Bruce and Yearley, 1989: 185).

Whilst never publicly expressing anything like the superabundance of the baroque princely gallery, the long gallery at Holyrood and other seats in Scotland nevertheless indicated a will to glorify important figureheads, to visually document the splendour of the nobility and aristocracy. By the end of the seventeenth century a taste for the palatial had underpinned the restoration of Lord Strathmore's Glamis from 1670, the Duke of Queensberry's Drumlanrig Castle in the late 1670s and the Duke of Lauderdale's Thirlestane around the same time. Set in formal gardens, and containing ornate plasterwork, grand furniture and extensive decoration, these seats of noble power combined a Scottish conservative restraint with a penchant for splendour, albeit in private form (Cornforth, 1989). The use of pictures to cover the walls, staircases and furniture of such houses is testament to the ability of families to obtain art from abroad in order to decorate their residences in exuberant style (Williams, 1992). It was certainly becoming easier for the richer Scottish families like the Clerks of Penicuik to obtain Old Masters and contemporary foreign works; auctions provided a useful outlet. Smout (1992), for instance, provides evidence of paintings sent from Holland by Andrew Russell, a Scottish merchant based in Rotterdam, between 1669 and 1691. And by the end of the century, there were Rembrandts in Holyrood Palace, Dutch landscapes in Hopetoun House, and an abundance of similar pictures at Prestonfield.

Continuing the Dutch connection, in the absence of a constituency of trained indigenous artists, the Netherlands provided a constant flow of craftsmen to Scotland, to work on every aspect of building, decoration and visual representation. Dutch artists made maps of Scotland early in the century, Dutch craftsmen decorated the houses of

Thirlestane and Holyrood and a collection of engravings of Scotland's main towns by a Dutchman, John Slezer, was published as *Theatrum Scotiae*, in 1693. That Scotland and the Netherlands shared a similar set of social, religious and political conditions made the interchange of goods, labour and ideas particularly smooth. Firstly, like the Stewart "court", the House of Orange was by no means an extravagant court of baroque splendour. Secondly, both nations were suffused with strong forms of Calvinism. And thirdly, as in the Dutch Republic, Scotland's burgher classes were beginning to show signs of economic and urban vitality, looking beyond the domestic market to Europe for trade, and embodying the Protestant virtues of hard work and parsimony (Smout, 1969).

In contrast to the Dutch Republic, however, Scotland did not experience a take-off in cultural and intellectual life in the seventeenth century. It could borrow from other successful nations but could offer very little in return. A cursory review of Scotland's social, political and economic life reveals why. This was a century of constant upheaval, in-fighting, political fragmentation and economic uncertainty. The Union of the Crowns of 1603 had removed James VI and his court from Edinburgh, leaving in its wake an obfuscated system of rule, reliant more on the principles of feudal rivalry and the ideas of the Protestant church than on kingship and central power. James prided himself on his ability to rule Scotland from afar, with the "pen" rather than the "sword".<sup>6</sup> To this end, the Privy Council had nominal authority in matters of governance, and for a time, peace and stability broke out in Jacobean Scotland (the principal target of favouritism and factionalism having been removed). Settled conditions reflected favourable economic trends in the burghs, which, in turn, steadied the supply of food. However, the absent court left a big hole as far as patronage of cultural activity was concerned. James VI, himself a writer, encouraged literature and drama and presided over a small but eager cultural centre. After 1603, however, Holyrood, ceased to be such a focus for artistic cultivation and any official impetus towards art patronage was diminished. This left a patronage gap that Scotland's developing country house culture could not be expected to fill (Lynch, 1991). Hence, while James and his son, king Charles I, commissioned

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<sup>6</sup> "I write and it is done, and by a clerk of the council I govern Scotland now, which others could not do by the sword" (quoted in Smout 1969: 102).

Rubens and Van Dyck at Whitehall, in Edinburgh there was no longer the spectacle of courtly life to draw other foreign artists north.

At the level of royal and political authority, moreover, what was a nebulous system of rule in Britain, in general, was more de-centralised in Scotland. Since the principal source of authority lay four hundred miles south (a journey that the king only managed once, in 1617), the way was left open for a variety of political and religious interests to battle for power and to resist the imposition of James' innovatory mechanisms of government. Scotland's parliament remained ineffectual and symbolically impotent, its jurisdiction constantly undermined by the countervailing forces of religion, class and feudal loyalty.

The situation inherited by Charles I in 1625, was, therefore, one in which a desire for British unity could remain only a vague dream. The reality was that the kingdom of the North had begun to resent the insensitivity of a king who willed a single British church without recognising Scotland's own religious idiosyncrasies. In particular, Charles I's inauguration of a new liturgy, a new prayer book, the retainment of church grants and the movement of bishops into key positions of authority, sparked a counter-attack that recovered the most concentrated aspects of the Reformation and turned them into a political force of some weight.

The National Covenant was drawn up by nobles, lesser lairds, burgers and ministers in 1638 against the "manyfold odoures" and "wicked hierarchies" of papistry that the Covenanters believed were undermining Scotland's (and Britain's) probity. The document called for a return of a General Assembly to Scotland and a dissolution of Anglican structures of authority in the Scottish system in the name of Presbyterian internationalism. In Edinburgh, churches were again sacked, organs destroyed, paintings burnt and musicians discharged. Always more puritan in its brand of Protestantism than the Dutch Republic, seventeenth century Scotland was imagined to be a realm of godly discipline, its citizens implored to embrace strict bodily deportment and personal piety. The strong links between individual behaviour and economic wealth, however, were less marked in Scottish Protestantism. As Smout (1969) remarks, whilst Dutch momentum to financial growth and economic individualism grew from its brand of Calvinism, in



Scotland the medieval ties of old society had remained a residual brake on economic expansion in the burghs.<sup>7</sup> In fact, regardless of religious hamstrings, Scotland's factional and increasingly unstable socio-political order remained a major obstacle to economic and cultural advancement.

And there was more to come. In reaction to fever-pitched religious feeling, the deposition of bishops and the ousting of episcopal traditions, Charles I declared war on Scotland. Trade was cut off to the northern kingdom, which, in turn, set the Covenanting army to march south seeking backing from English Presbyterians. Politics and statecraft had clearly been transposed to an ecclesiastical key, and Scottish resistance to royal directives had revealed the inability of a centralised system of crown management to impose its will on Britain in general. As Lynch remarks: "The wars were a decisive point not only in the history of Scotland, but in that of Great Britain. They exposed the hollow shell of Caroline absolute monarchy, which failed to demonstrate *force majeure*" (1991: 270).

Developments south of the border confirmed the weakness of the British monarchy. Civil war and the execution of Charles I at the hands of Cromwell's English Independents indicated the fragility of the crown in relation to parliament. A month after Charles' execution in 1649, parliament abolished the monarchy, as Cromwell's army imposed a republican governmental structure on the rest of Britain. In Scotland, Charles' execution was met with dismay. At stake was the imagined, sacralised lineage of Stewart blood. By 1651 the Scots had declared the king's son as Charles II on the condition that his power was neither absolute nor independent of the principles of the Covenant. As Cromwell moved into Scotland, imposing administrative and political union with England, Charles II escaped to France, leaving an uncertain and fragmented system of rule in his wake.

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<sup>7</sup> Hence, the Kirk Session restricted opening hours for markets and affirmed a form of group moral behaviour in the guilds over economic individualism. No overt connection was made between salvation and economic wealth in Scotland, (unlike the Weberian ideal type). Instead economic turmoil and speculation was often considered a sign of sin. As Smout summarises: "Such philosophy, by setting the businessman to examine his soul rather than his account books might prove positively discouraging to economic progress" (1969: 89).

Cromwellian Scotland was a mixture of relative autonomy, violent rivalism and centralised military governance. Although Scotland was given a separate Council in 1657, representation at parliament was negligible, with half of the thirty seats at Westminster given to English army officers (Lynch, 1991). Cromwell enacted revenge on the Covenanters who had organized invasions into England in the 1640s, and forged administrative union between the two kingdoms. The General Assembly was abolished in 1653, although Cromwell's brand of puritanism continued many of the precepts of radical Presbyterianism. Sabbatarianism, for example, was as strict as before, as the regime banned the public from frequenting taverns, "profanely walking", brewing ale, baking bread, travelling or indulging in any "this-worldly" business on Sundays (Smout, 1969). And while Scotland was perhaps more stable and acquiescent under Cromwell's unified system of "justice", the rifts that marked the Scottish social structure, between vying factions within the church and state remained.

On Cromwell's death in 1658, the already restored Charles II legislated for a balanced political regime that would appease Protestants, Loyalists and Catholic bishops alike. Administratively, the new king reinstated the Scottish Parliament, but through his Commissioners and Viceroy retained direct authority and restored episcopal power.<sup>8</sup> The Earl of Aberdeen and the Duke of Lauderdale were both governors of the "subject province". Lauderdale, in particular, exercised his power from the centre and enjoyed the splendour of the Palace of Holyrood which he had remodelled by Sir William Bruce. By the late 1670s, however, Charles II's brother, James, was dispatched north to reside at the palace in order to defuse tensions in England resulting from his avowed Catholicism.

To an extent, James' royal presence acted as a catalyst for cultural and intellectual production in Scotland. During the 1680s, Edinburgh, in particular, underwent a mini-Renaissance with regard to patronage and cultural development. As Duke of York, James

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<sup>8</sup> As Mitchison (1983) notes, restoration Scotland was reconstituted as a "separate kingdom", but local institutions and men of power merely enacted the will of the court in London (as was the case in Ireland and America). Paradoxically, however, whilst parliament in England was congealing into a powerful, centralised instrument of governance, Scottish affairs were largely kept out of government by the king. To this extent, factional interests tended to form around religion and (Stewart) royalism, with the Scottish parliament remaining largely perfunctory.

patronised various professional institutions including the Royal College of Physicians, the Advocate's Library, the Order of the Thistle, the Physic Garden and the Royal College of Archers. James responded to professional demand for scholarly advance, thereby securing personal political popularity amongst the most active constituency of Edinburgh society. Doctors, lawyers and academics were all given a more creative space within which to assert their intellectual and scholarly values (Ouston, 1982).<sup>9</sup> Professionals intermingled increasingly with the aristocracy, and shared similar ideals of virtue, loyalty and royalty. These ideals were particularly important given James' religious affiliations and his father's execution - potent fuel for the fire that Covenanters were stoking once again. Defence to renewed anti-royalism formed around James' appeal to Stewart paternalism and heritage, giving added urgency to projects such as the De Wet portraits, with its emphasis on dynastic succession.

In the 1680s, then, Edinburgh began to experience the stability and cultural accoutrements of a capital, with "national" institutions, libraries, collections of curios, scientific instruments, and philosophical works. Picture collecting had become an established activity for aristocrats with contacts on the continent, although most practising indigenous artists could not survive on domestic commissions alone and moved to Rome or London. Some of the feudal ties of the burghs and the traditional values of medievalism had begun to dissolve. The surgeon's guild, for instance, gave way to a more professionalised collective in this period. The Canongate once more flourished with ceremony and entertainment and Holyrood was transformed into a space, if not baroque, then managing some courtly pomp and splendour.

In keeping with Scotland's turbulent history, such tranquillity and cultural advancement did not last for long. As the Duke of York became James VII of England (II of Scotland) in 1685, leaving Edinburgh for London, the way was again left open for

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<sup>9</sup> As Ouston states: "Patronage was provided for surgery, cartography, mathematics and engineering, and individuals who benefitted from the royalist regime were involved in the full range of seventeenth century intellectual activities, from the medicine of Harvey and the philosophy of Newton to numismatics and weather recording" (1982: 133). Indeed, it is the development of this professional space in the eighteenth century that is crucial to the progress of the civic art field as I will intimate later.

political and religious turmoil. Eventually, James' aggressive Roman Catholic policies were ignored by the Scottish parliament, resulting in their imposition by royal prerogative. Not long after James had introduced a catholic printing press at Holyrood, and concern had grown over the religious education of James' newly born son, support for the revolution of the House of Orange, a product of parliamentary power south of the border, was secure in Scotland.

The Glorious Revolution of 1688 again threw Scotland into a period of uncertainty and instability. William never visited Edinburgh during his reign and was never crowned in Scotland, favouring James VI's method of ruling from afar. However, the relationship between the British crown and Scottish society was again muddled, particularly as king William appeared not to comprehend the fact that he presided over two relatively separate countries (McKean, 1991). Scottish parliament still convened but only with the assent and control of the king and London. By 1690, the Whig Williamite parliament, had worked out a new constitution for the Church of Scotland, abolishing catholic bishops and puritanising worship and theology. But the church remained subject to parliamentary statute (a relationship which was to constantly plague Scottish society for centuries to come). As Jacobite insurgency in Glencoe was put down by crown and parliament in the 1690s, it became apparent that politics in Williamite Scotland was still a product of local loyalties and historical vendettas rather than modern national-state administration.<sup>10</sup>

Still prone to factionalism and economically distressed, Scotland's leaders embarked on a project to boost trade and to stave off famine. In 1695 the Scottish company *Caledonian Imperialism* instigated colonialism on the isthmus of Darien, in

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<sup>10</sup> Politics and loyalty in Scotland centred on localism, with the Houses of Hamilton, Queensberry, Atholl and Argyll in a constant struggle for power and favouritism. As Mitchison (1983) clarifies: "Politics in Revolution Scotland is more understandable as a local manifestation of that early modern feature, international anarchy, than, as a period in the growth of the self-conscious nation state. Traditionally the institutions of the state, which were poorly developed, had not been strong enough to create an aura of patriotism, except during foreign invasions, and the central government had whatever value it did have to such great men as an area for bargaining, a means of obtaining power over men and lands in return for occasions of military or political support (124).



Panama. Shareholders were encouraged and subscriptions gathered from Scots and English merchants alike. It was soon apparent, however, that the scheme was doomed. Spanish interests in the land clashed with those of the Scottish imperialists and the English parliament pulled its support. The result in Darien was famine, malaria, death and wasted resources; the Spanish attacked and the colony was abandoned. The failure of Darien indicated the lack of effective government in Scotland and from 1700 on, under William and his successor Anne (James VII's daughter) the Privy Council in Scotland was stripped of all independence and became subject to the will of the London court and ministry (Mitchison, 1983).

The drift to Union in 1707 reflected parliament's desire for peace but also Scotland's need for commercial stability and a share in colonial wealth. Worked out by politicians on both sides in 1706, Union appeared to safeguard Scottish commercial interests and national independence in education, law and religion. An Equivalent of £400,000 was given to compensate for the Darien losses and for the future share of English debt. A reduced tax level was agreed and additional sums set aside to encourage manufacturing (money which later fed into the development of art and design). While the Scots surrendered their parliament, union seemed to be a "pragmatic" and "realistic" response to difficult economic circumstances. Union with England paved the way for new trading opportunities, access to colonial markets and the bolstering of Presbyterianism in the north. Indeed, defence of Scottish Protestantism was felt to be more important than the loss of a secular parliament, which, itself had not played a particularly central part in guiding Scottish affairs thus far.<sup>11</sup>

The removal of parliament also removed the grand nobility and their powers of patronage. Patrimonial absence after the Union was, hence, a further setback to visual

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<sup>11</sup> As Paterson writes in this connection: "The parliament had played little role in the conflicts with the monarch before 1640, or after 1660: the role of national leadership had been taken by the church's General Assembly, in contrast to England where parliament was central. In England (with memories of the time of Henry VIII), parliament became the key symbol of national independence of the integrity of the nation against royal tyranny. That was not an obsession that the Scots could share. Surrendering their parliament in 1707 in return for safeguarding the church and the royal burghs could seem to be a good national bargain" (1994: 31).

cultural production, thickening the scars of seventeenth century upheaval, conflict and fragmentation. Despite the social tumult, Edinburgh in the early eighteenth century did begin to show signs of general improvement in matters “artistic”. For instance, the capital attracted the professional services of John De Medina, a portraitist from Brussels, who had originally settled in London in competition with Sir Godfrey Kneller. Medina painted portraits in a diluted baroque style which suited his patrons, including the Earl of Leven and the Duke of Argyll, who was painted with his two sons around 1694. He managed to sustain a successful business in the capital, dabbling also in figure compositions and subjects drawn from classical mythology (Holloway, 1990). Medina was largely employed, however, as a portraitist, saving his professional and aristocratic sitters the trouble of travelling to London for their mementos. His virtual monopoly of this market spoke of the limited opportunities that were available to portraitists in Edinburgh, many of whom sought alternative outlets abroad.



Figure 28a: Archibald, 1<sup>ST</sup> Duke of Argyll and his two sons, John de Medina, c. 1690



Figure 28b: David, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Leven, John de Medina, 1691

For much of the early modern period covered here, the clouds that darkened Scotland’s social edifice also poured upon and extinguished the little sparks of cultural activity that were glimpsed in the capital. Edinburgh’s court was a fluttering institution that only vaguely resembled the self-confident, fully grown beast of Catholic Europe. Patronage

was hesitant, display was primitive and artistic practice was timid. The social fabric of Scotland had worn so thin by the early eighteenth century that most of the elite's vital energies could never have been given over to patronage in the grand style, even if the resources were available. In comparison to London, the cumulative de-centralisation of Edinburgh's seats of power was a process that did untold damage to coherent forms of visual ostentation and artistic support. As spectacular structures of visual display flourished in countries with centralised sites of power, absolute monarchs and princely galleries, Edinburgh would always lag behind.

Precisely because of western European shifts towards the modern, however, the potency of absolutism and its princely forms of exhibition became slowly diluted, to be replaced, as argued in chapter two, by national, constitutional arrangements deriving from the impulses of civil society. And in certain respects, Edinburgh was better placed to enjoy the fruits of these modern arrangements, to "catch up" with artistic fields elsewhere. This all pointed to a brighter century to come as political and economic instability in Scotland gradually gave way to calmer waters where the vessels of cultural achievement could float with greater confidence.

### **C: Stirrings of the Modern: 1707-1760**

"When a great court engages the attendance of a numerous nobility, possessed of overgrown fortunes, the middling gentry remain in their provincial towns, where they can make a figure on a moderate income. And if the dominions of a state arrive at an enormous size, there necessarily arise many capitals, in the remoter provinces, whither all the inhabitants, except a few courtiers, repair for education, fortune, and amusement" (David Hume, "Populousness of Ancient Nations", 1779: 448).

Before the achievements of the Enlightenment, however, there was still a period of adjustment to the new world that Union had brought. For several decades poverty, instability and upheaval continued to characterise the social, political and cultural life of Edinburgh. Areas such as the Canongate fell into disrepair with the loss of the greater nobility; the threat of Jacobite unrest was felt acutely with the uprising of 1715; and economic depression continued to dog Scottish society as market competition with the likes of Ireland and continental Europe exposed Scotland to the perils of free trade, leading to the virtual collapse of its linen industry.

Only after these upheavals had subsided did the leaders of Scottish society, the minor nobility, gentry and professionals, gather themselves to mobilise institutions and organisations in Edinburgh in order to rejuvenate economy and society.<sup>12</sup> As the capital provided a focal point for the collective aspirations of the newly sequestered elite, the city's morphology began to change, opening up new cultural, economic and social opportunities. This provincial oligarchy of landed society ruled Edinburgh through the court of session and the Scottish bar, embedding in the city's provincial institutions fertile impulses towards modernisation. It may not have possessed the grandeur of the more substantial nobility that used to reside in Edinburgh, but its willingness to mix with and patronise the emerging *literati* gave it an invaluable modernising edge that was to spread by the end of the century (Phillipson, 1975).

One institution that gave expression to the urge to modernise was the Board of Trustees for the Manufacture of Agriculture and Fisheries, founded in 1727. The Board, comprised of lesser nobility and substantial gentry, was established by central government to administer a £2,000 per annum grant to Scotland's developing industries. This was a political concession to Scotland to offset losses from customs, taxes and excises appropriated by the English government, but which helped to secure peace and stability north of the border. The Board earmarked funds for three areas: herring fisheries, linen and hemp manufacture, and coarse wool. It issued premiums for the growth of better quality flax and the introduction of new methods of "scutching" and "heckling" which prepared the flax for spinning (NG1). The Board engaged in the modernisation of agriculture in general, purchasing machinery, distributing funds to farmers, encouraging inventions and, later, promoting commercial design. This was particularly necessary in the Highlands, where funds encouraging the termination of outdated farming methods

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<sup>12</sup> One such institution was the Honourable the Society for Improvement in the Knowledge of Agriculture, founded in 1723, and comprising 300 members drawn from the nobility and gentry, including judges and advocates. The fostering of modern agricultural techniques of production reflected in this elite group the desire for improvement that was generic across much of Europe. This particular society saw it fit to encourage the application of new scientific methods to agriculture, replacing the system of runrig with enclosure. The Medical Society of 1731 and the Philosophical Society of 1737 were similar, if short-lived, institutions that spoke of the growing self-confidence and collective agency of Edinburgh's leaders.



had soaked up a major portion of available resources. Success was steady but not dramatic, as shown by the increase in production of Scottish linen “from an annual average of 3.5 million yards in 1728-32 to 7.3 yards twenty years later” (Gifford, 1989: 18).<sup>13</sup>

The Board’s remit fed off and into the desire to modernise Scotland’s agriculture and industry. In this capacity, the Board reported to the crown each year, and its personnel were appointed from London. But like the Honourable Society for the Improvement of Knowledge in Agriculture, the Board of Trustees exercised a fair degree of control over its own interests. The Board may have been funded from government, but its detailed business was run locally by Scottish landed improvers. How was it able to do this? Because the state of Scotland’s system of political rule after the Union allowed it.

Far from being ruled with an iron fist from London, Scotland retained a great deal of autonomy in matters of national governance. Political management resided in a system of relatively autonomous institutions in Edinburgh that set the pace of social change. Economic and agricultural reform, for instance, was often implemented not by British central government, but by pro-active landlords and merchants (Paterson, 1994). Of course on the one hand, political managers such as the Duke of Argyll had been positioned as managers, or “surrogate monarchs” of the British crown, implementing many of the wishes of London. But, on the other hand, the governmental affairs of Scotland were rarely heard in the London parliament (and this also goes for art matters, as I will intimate later). What was in place by the mid eighteenth century was a framework of “benign neglect” (Paterson, 1994) that allowed a civil society of enterprising leaders and *literati* to emerge in the capital and to shape the urban infrastructure. This was important precisely because it enabled the ideas of enlightened thinkers to flourish and crystallise into non-governmental institutions and activities in Scottish society. This in turn provided impetus to a modern artistic field.

Accordingly, signs of a more complex field of cultural activity were shown by the

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<sup>13</sup> The Board of Trustees’ significance, however, resides not merely with agricultural improvement. It later came to shape Edinburgh’s fine art field itself, with the gradual shift in its administrative role from early 19th century, from agriculture, to design, to art education and eventually to the guardianship of the National Gallery of Scotland.

early decades of the eighteenth century with the rise of small societies that met to discuss, encourage or practice a range of intellectual, cultural and economic activities.<sup>14</sup> Many of these were short-lived and unimpressive in membership, but they were formal in structure and drew their cohort from Edinburgh's elite: gentlemen, professionals, lawyers, doctors, artisans and ministers. As Phillipson notes:

Their only common characteristic was their youth and the fact that they were about to embark on careers which would probably confine them to Scotland. In other words, like the aristocratic improvers, they were men whose expectations of life were firmly confined by the limits of the life of provincial Scotland (1975, 133).

Allan Ramsay, father to the enlightened portraitist of the same name, was one such figure. A poet in the bucolic idiom, Ramsay helped to organise various clubs in the capital, opened a bookshop (which sold engravings of well-known pictures and views), the first lending library in Britain and a theatre. In doing so, Ramsay helped to supplement Edinburgh's lack of official patronage after the Union. As a poet, Ramsay wrote *The Gentle Shepherd* in 1725, establishing the idiom of "national pastoral" in Scotland. This provided subject matter for artists, vernacular poets and novelists alike: his influence on Burns, MacPherson and Scott is noteworthy (Pittock, 1991; Noble, 1982).<sup>15</sup> As an organiser and would-be patron, he was also a key figure in setting up Edinburgh's first academy of painting and drawing, St Luke's Academy, in 1729.

St Luke's was Scotland's first "art" institution, an academy of art that reflected the aspirations of some of Edinburgh's patrons and professionals to raise the status of art in the capital above that of its past. Setting up an academy, in other words, represented the striving for professional recognition that had hitherto evaded visual culture, with its

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<sup>14</sup> With respect to music, Edinburgh witnessed the spectacle of weekly concerts at St Mary's chapel by 1728. Organised by the Musical Society, performances were based on "a proper mixture of the ancient and modern. In every plan, there are one or two pieces of Corelli, Handel or Geminiani" (cited in McKean, 1991:131).

<sup>15</sup> Ramsay wrote about the innocence and simplicity of an imagined Scotland before modernisation - a hike into idealised landscape that emerging poets elsewhere shared in the wake of disruption and the dissolution of feudal traditions. Whilst this ultimately developed into a form of safe, retreating nostalgia (Ramsay himself de-vulgarised many folk songs for the British context), such poetry in the early eighteenth century helped to open up writing and cultural production, in general, to a new audience.

close connections to a pre-modern system of craft. Modelled on academies elsewhere (Sir Godfrey Kneller's in London and the *Accademia* of San Luca in Rome) the academy took residence in rooms at the Edinburgh college at the invitation of the city council. Documents show six initial signatories of the charter included Allan Ramsay senior and junior, the engraver Richard Cooper, the landscape painter James Norie, the architect William Adam and aristocratic patrons including Lord Garlies and Lord Linton. The academy's charter described its members as: "Noblemen, Gentlemen, Patrons, Painters, and lovers of Painting" (cited in Macmillan, 1986: 15), indicating the extent to which urban professionals and members of the landed classes shared similar spaces and aspirations by the middle of the eighteenth century (Cummings, 1994).

St Luke's prescribed aim was "the encouragement of these excellent arts of Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, etc., and Improvement of the students" (Holloway, 1989: 105). A small sum (half a guinea) was charged to students, who attended two hour classes on four days a week. Training involved copying originals, engravings, casts, medals and drawings, many of which were lent to the Academy by Richard Cooper. These included classical scenes and ruins from Roman history by the likes of Rosa, Poussin and other seventeenth century "masters". In spite of the relatively short lifespan of the academy - it disbanded after two or three years - its key figures went on to practice in more advantageous artistic conditions in the latter half of the eighteenth century. The academy of St Luke showed the ideational willingness of certain members of the professional and landed classes to reach beyond the guild-apprentice system and formulate something approaching a modern academy, with modern teaching practices.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Further evidence of this striving for autonomy is given in Macmillan's (1986) account of two incidents in the city. The first relates to the earlier incorporation of guilds of St Mary's Chapel, which accepted pieces of work on completion of apprenticeship. In 1718, the landscape painter James Norie was given the task of painting the chapel's chimneypiece, showing all the guilded trades together. In doing so, Norie somehow disrupted the traditional hierarchy of trades, in favour of the painters. "Such a serious row ensued" says Macmillan, "that some members of the chapel broke in during the night and altered the painting" (16-17). The issue was resolved, ironically given the yearning for artistic autonomy, by cutting the picture in half and presenting each to the relevant parties, the masons and the wrights (including the painters). A related incident concerns a picture by Roderick Chalmers depicting the trades before Holyrood, in 1720. Chalmers chose to paint representatives from all the trades standing in working gear, caps, aprons and leathers. The painter, however, is shown perched on a stool, in fine velvet and wig, documenting

Its relative failure perhaps spoke of the gap that existed at this time, between the wishes of cultural leaders like these, and the actual civic infrastructure that could support them: that is, between the ideas of emergent professionals and the relative immaturity of the field.

As it happened, artistic conditions had changed quite markedly from the seventeenth century. From 1707 to 1750, some civic leaders such as George Drummond, the Lord Provost, exercised the power of patronage in chosen cultural ventures: Palladian architecture and university education as well as portraiture (of course, dictating the overall handling of the picture, the dress and posture). And Edinburgh was beginning to play host to more auctions, with pictures and engravings circulating at a faster rate. In 1740, an auction took place at the artist William Mosman's house in Writer's Court, which included: "a curious collection of Pictures, Drawings, Statues, Busts, Bass Relieves, Sulphurs, from Intalios and Italian Prints belonging to William Mosman...collected and done by him during his six years residence at Rome, for his own use" (cited in Holloway, 1989: 99). In 1752, a collection including "some original paintings by Rembrandt, Hans Holbein, Snyders etc some miniature paintings and enamellings, set in Gold, India and other Curiosities, and a large Parcel of Drawings, Italian French and Flemish prints...by the best engravers" was sold over a five day period in the capital (*Caledonian Mercury*, 1752, cited in Gow and Rowan, 1995: 113). Pictures bought on the continent, Rome especially, were finding their way back to Edinburgh. Seventeenth century Italian masters were a particular favourite, for such pictures embodied an aristocratic classicism that found some currency with the ideals of Edinburgh's residual gentry, although taste for grand manner art appeared not to take off in the way it had done south of the border, in part because of the absence of the greater nobility in Edinburgh.

Furthermore, for those Scottish aristocrats who took the Grand Tour there were ample opportunities to procure art works for interested friends and relatives back home. The travel diaries of John Hope, 2nd Earl of Hopetoun, for instance, describe a five year

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the painter's desired status-distance between art and craft.



Grand Tour of the Low Countries, France and Italy, undertaken between 1722 and 1727 (Hopetoun Research Group Studies, 1987). The tour's objects of interest were rich and varied, including industrial techniques, military tactics and trade conditions, as well as architecture, food, books, and pictures. Hope travelled with his tutor, William Dundas and visited picture galleries, palaces and chapels in Antwerp, Dusseldorf, Florence, Bologna, Parma, Milan and Paris. In the latter they visited Duke D'Autin's House "containing a Great number of the Kings best Pictures" (1987: 12) as well as the *Palais du Luxembourg* with its "Gallery most excellently well painted by Rubens" (1987: 12). In both cases Hope and his tutor had to pay four livres for entry, for this was twenty five years before spaces like the *Luxembourg* were made accessible to the public *gratis*. While abroad, Lord Hope was urged by his uncle Lord Annandale to make contacts befitting the status of the young aristocrat. Indeed, Annandale often provided letters of introduction to figures such as the Duke of Lorraine, the Count Alvarotto in Padua and the Countess Barromeo in Milan.<sup>17</sup> Lord Annandale's most urgent request, however, was for the procurement of pictures - "his commissions" as he termed them. Annandale was a collector of art objects, and his request of knowledge for the French fashion in arranging pictures is testament to the desire for such aristocratic "men of taste" to emulate continental trends in Scotland by the 1730s. This was particularly relevant in the light of the redecoration of Hopetoun House under William Adam and James Norie. Hence in a letter to Lord Hope in 1726, Annandale wrote: "I was talking lately with your Papa here and he seemed almost persuaded to lay out five hundred pounds upon pictures. And also to buy marbles for his chimneys and ornamenting the Great Apartment" (4-5). Pictures were duly sent back by Lord Hope from Holland, to end up in one of the most lavish country houses in Scotland.

Hopetoun House is situated just north of Edinburgh, overlooking the Firth of

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<sup>17</sup> Annandale writes to Lord Hope thus: "Get the Acquaintance and favour of Learned and ingenious men, and those that are distinguished by the Rank, Virtue and Politeness, which you will always find of the greatest satisfaction and use to you, and not difficult to be attained in a place where they are disposed to be affable to strangers of any figure. I would much rather hear of this with some of your observations upon Raphael, Bramante, Michael Angelo, Barnini, Boromini etc, than such a bridge, or pass over such a mountain" (Hopetoun Research Group Series, 1987: 2).

Forth, and gives us an idea of aristocratic methods of visual display at this time. The house was originally built by the architect William Bruce in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, for the first Earl of Hopetoun. The decision to enlarge Hopetoun in the 1720s reflects changes in the political context of Scotland and of the status of the Hope family itself. The Hanoverian Charles Hope was raised to the peerage as Earl of Hopetoun in 1703, in the wake of the Glorious Revolution; and, as with the logic of conspicuous consumption on the continent, the building had to reflect the relative position of the owner. The previous building, in other words, could not sufficiently index the power and prestige of an Earl.<sup>18</sup> So Hopetoun was enlarged, not in the style of “chaste Palladianism”, but in the “heroic manner of English Baroque design in which a giant order of fluted Corinthian pilasters dictates the scale of the facade” (Rowan, 1984: 189).



Figure 29: Hopetoun House, Entrance Front Designed by William Adam after 1720

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<sup>18</sup> Indeed another of William Adam’s patrons, Sir John Clerk of Penicuik, articulated this very sentiment in his description of a visit to Studley Royal in 1738: “Here I saw a perfect superfluity of Temples, Groves, Parterrs, canals and all other Embellishments, which seemed to become a prince more than a private Man”. Equally, Clerk’s poem, “The Country Seat”, distinguishes between the royal palace, the “house of state”, the “house of convenience and use” and the villa (cited in Gifford, 1989).



William Adam was chosen to re-build Hopetoun. Adam was considered Scotland's "universal architect", designing (for Dukes, Earls and Lords) some of the country's most lavish homages to power and property and enjoyed an unprecedented level of patronage for the building of private houses.<sup>19</sup> Hopetoun was one of Adam's more elaborate buildings, notable not merely for its external effect but for its internal splendour. For as Gow indicates, the key characteristic of Adam's houses "lay in their state apartments and, although they followed the mould established by Bruce for Holyrood, Adam brought to them a new emphasis on magnificence" (Gow 1990: 94).<sup>20</sup> The procurement of pictures, many of which belonged to Lord Annandale, was a significant means of raising the interior effect of Hopetoun's rooms to such splendid heights.



Figure 30a: Cupola, Hopetoun House



Figure 30b: Decorative Panelling, Hopetoun House



Figure 30c: State Dining Room, Hopetoun House

<sup>19</sup> Besides designing the castles at Taymouth and Floors, the Houses at Mavisbank and Dalmahoy and the grand seat at Arniston, Adam tapped into improved conditions for building in the capital. Indeed, between 1734 and 1748, Adam was charged with the design of some of eighteenth-century Edinburgh's most important buildings. These included the austere, Palladian orphan's hospital, George Watson's charity hospital, and the Royal Infirmary, built to a large u-shape design with pared down ornamentation, but with carved mannerist scrolls and in-built ionic columns (Gifford, 1989).

<sup>20</sup> In fact the resemblance of the suite of rooms constituting the state apartments to the enfilade of apartments at Versailles has been noted (Hopetoun House catalogue, 1996)

As the illustrations show, the decorative scheme reflected the newly glamourised apartments completed by William's son Robert Adam on the former's death in 1748. Some of the rooms contained scenes from Greek mythology; the yellow drawing room included *The Adoration of the Shepherds* from the studio of Rubens, two seascapes by Vergruggen, the *Temptation of St Anthony* by Teniers and a *Portrait of a Young Man* by the school of Caracci. The front stairs were decorated with gilded wall paintings, family crests and late seventeenth century commissioned pieces from the Dutchman Philip Tideman. And throughout the house can be found evidence of the work of James Norie, the landscape decorator and painter, who worked closely with Adam in many of the country scheme decorative cycles in Scotland. Such visual adornment formed part of the overall function of any room, adding to the whole ambiance or decorative effect of the house. Norie's work, in particular, reveals the status of landscape painting at this time, to harmonise the overall effect of certain rooms, functioning as "up-market wallpaper" in relation to a generalised decorative scheme.

Indeed, the same observation can be applied to Norie's work throughout Scotland, guided as it was by heteronomy and the decorative needs of the aristocracy. Such work belonged to the old system of craft and design rather than that which Norie and others were hoping to stimulate on the back of ventures like St Luke's academy. The staple work for landscapists in Scotland included theatre backdrops, gutter and sign painting, heraldic crests and coffin decoration. Hopetoun had commissioned Norie in 1735 to paint the family's arms and motto on the side panel of the Earl's carriage; and much of the house's panelling, coving and skirting was painted by Norie and his sons. The Great Dining room, for instance, was painted by Norie at various times from the 1730s to the 1750s, the last in four coats of "fine white"; while the utilitarian function ascribed by patrons generally to Norie's work is documented in Lord Glenorchy's commission for a panorama of Taymouth Castle and Loch Tay. This was treated as functional reportage rather than art in its "own right", to the extent that within six years the patron commissioned another artist to paint over the original in order to record the changes made to his estate.

In this regard, cultural workers such as Norie were in no position to assert their



own autonomy as “fine artists” during this period. Landed patrons still held the key to the status of visual display, and, as their position in the social system was consolidated, they emulated stately arrangements found south of the border and on the continent. To an extent, this country house culture dissolved, or least diluted the energy needed to stimulate a modern urban field in the capital. The patrimonial attachments between aristocratic patron and artist guaranteed the utter dependence of the latter on the former at a time when elsewhere artists were beginning to break free of such ties. Something akin to an art market was starting to take shape in the capital by the middle of the eighteenth century, with domestic auctioneers such as John Elspen and Charles Robertson organising lots for pictures as well as running decorative painting business. But collections of pictures were sold not according to the artist, but to the suitability of a piece for a particular location: “A fine collection of pictures, some fit for halls, staircases, chambers and closets”, “A large landscape for a staircase, A landscape for a doorpiece, A landscape for a Chimney-piece” (cited in Holloway, 1990, 65). A more traditional system of craft, design and guild-based apprenticeship therefore, remained dominant throughout Scotland until the late eighteenth century.

To re-iterate, then, it would be a mistake to read developments in the market and the public sphere as indicators of a fully-fledged fine art field of production in Edinburgh in the early eighteenth century. The vital catalysts and energies that could ignite the formation of public exhibitions, journals, groups of self-consciously professional artists, modern urban patrons and an art-buying middle class were yet to materialise. Edinburgh was a provincial city that, like Dublin, Bordeaux, Lyons and Lausanne, played host to an increasing number of organisations, but lacked the institutional complexity of a metropolis (Emerson, 1973a). In casting envious glances elsewhere, small groups and individual artists may have hoped to forge the institutional tools of a modern field, but the whole system of patronage was bigger than individual aspirations. And this system was still shot through with several centuries worth of socio-political agitation and cultural dislocation. A directory of Edinburgh in 1752, compiled by Gilhooley (1988) reveals just how few artists there were in the city. Out of a population of around 31,430, only eighteen are listed as “painters” (including “limners”); and the Nories are listed as “paint

and dye merchants". In the early eighteenth century many of Scotland's most prolific artists were still unable to live and practice in their native cities. William Aikman, for a time Scotland's grand portraitist, was forced to follow his grand clients south after the Union for lack of institutional and patronal support in Edinburgh. Aikman's colleague, John Smibert (1688-1751) was driven to America to seek a more sustaining system of patronage; and the portraitist Allan Ramsay left Edinburgh in 1733 to train in London and Italy, only later to return to Scotland's capital. Clearly, it was going to take a while for artists and patrons to develop relatively autonomous institutions of artistic support. For now, Edinburgh was more often than not the early training ground for artists who would eventually emigrate.

Still, the signs were promising. An emerging middle class urban public was in a more favourable position to purchase artistic objects, as Union slowly delivered a more stable and prosperous society. Religious forces against cultural expression were lessening, allowing theatre, dance and music to take place in the city. And the dominant constituency of Scottish society, the aristocracy and lesser gentry, were beginning to let themselves be influenced by modern, urban fashions that a *literati* in Edinburgh were promoting with great articulacy. So by the latter half of the century, modernity, across many institutions and discourses emerged in more concentrated fashion. What provided the bedrock for this institutional modernity was the constitution of civil society.

## ART, ENLIGHTENMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN EDINBURGH, 1760-1800

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“the separation of professions, while it seems to promise improvement of skill...is actually the cause why the production of every art become more perfect as commerce advances” (Adam Ferguson”, *Essay on Civil Society*, 1767).

It is, of course, impossible to do justice to the vastness, richness and complexity of the Scottish Enlightenment in one short chapter. Capturing facets of a national *mentalité* requires a large dedicated study itself, not a diminutive chapter. It is equally one-sided to concentrate on the fine arts at the expense of science, agriculture, moral philosophy or law. However, in order to locate the eighteenth century in relation to artistic advancement and models of socio-cultural development already mentioned such shortcuts will be necessary. There is, however, a substantial literature on the “Scottish Enlightenment” which covers much of the ground overlooked here (Rendall, 1978; Chitnis, 1976; Daiches et al, 1986; McElroy, 1969; Phillipson, 1973a, 1973b; Lenman, 1981; Devine, 1990; Smout, 1969). For now, I must restrict my comments to general statements about the state of the economy, agriculture, politics and culture in Scotland (mainly Edinburgh) and then go on to some more focused questions. In particular: how did a creative intellectual and cultural space - which nurtured and played host to some of the brightest and most original minds in Europe - emerge out of what was a relatively small, poor and unstable country? What shape did civil society take from the mid-eighteenth century and how did this impact on Edinburgh’s art field? Who were the new patrons? Why, what and who did they patronise? What function did the critic and aesthetics have on the field and to what extent did spaces of high culture emerge to contain, display or market fine art objects?

In order to place this part of Scotland’s socio-cultural history in relation to the models of artistic formation already assembled it would be necessary to say that: 1) this was a period of intense development in artistic production; 2) Edinburgh’s structures of

cultural production and distribution appear to converge to a certain extent with those of England, and perhaps Continental Europe; 3) that this was in no small part thanks to the constellation of forces, discourses and institutions that have been called “civil society”; 4) and yet there were certain important dynamics missing in the cultural field which meant Scotland still lacked nationally-sponsored spaces for exhibition by the late eighteenth century; 5) therefore, as far as art galleries are concerned, this period can be seen as an important buffer zone between the artistic poverty of the seventeenth century and the fruition of the early nineteenth century. It is a period of cultural intensity that promotes and builds many things, but a national gallery is not one of them.

### **A: Introduction: The Scottish Enlightenment**

The Scottish Enlightenment was an intellectual outpouring of modern ideas, practices and values based on modern “rational” precepts that swept away many of the older traditions of a feudal, religious and rural universe. It was a period of intense development founded on a bedrock of ideas regarding improvement, education, understanding and toleration that spread beyond Scotland and England into the very heart of European modernity. Its immediate origins may have been Scottish (and British) but its wider family was definitely European. Links between the Netherlands, Scotland and France, in particular, made the currency of ideas between these nations particularly smooth (Chitnis, 1976). In the latter two cases, but particularly in Edinburgh, the most pro-active social agency was the same: the professional middle classes - the lawyers, doctors, and university professors - who, with the powerful backing of landed society transformed civic and national institutions under the maxim of “improvement”.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The exact time span of the Enlightenment has been a matter of some debate, but it is perhaps useful to chronologise the Enlightenment, loosely, around the late eighteenth century; from, say, 1760 to the late years of the century. For this was the period - “the age of reason”, “the age of improvement”, “the golden age” - in which many of the most representative trends, institutions, figures and ideas of the Enlightenment flourished. It was a period in which Adam Ferguson, David Hume, Adam Smith and William Robertson shaped the modern disciplinary contours of economics, sociology, history and philosophy; when James Hutton developed the foundational principles of modern geology; Joseph Black discovered “fixed air” (carbon dioxide); James and Robert Adam sculpted the urban and rural landscapes of Britain with the tropes of neo-classicism; Lord Kames and Lord Monboddo wrote modern treatises combining law, literature



The general flowering of a middle and upper middle-class culture goes to the heart of what was so striking about this period in Scottish history. Lowland civic centres played host to an explosion of “refined” culture - architecture as well as poetry, cafe society as well as collecting, historiography as well as furniture - that metamorphosed the overall shape and function of the cities themselves. For this was the period in which a developing middle class fostered its “revolution of manners” by promoting and appropriating certain distinct cultural expressions considered to be “civilized” and “polite”. High culture, here, grew as a relatively distinct well of forms, values and behaviours from which the intelligentsia (or *literati*), hand in hand with landed society, quaffed freely. Practitioners in pertinent aspects of culture began, as a result, to enjoy a more stable system of patronage conducive to innovation and experimentation. With the added advantages of a more tolerant religious edifice, political stability and institutional support, the “golden age of Scottish culture” nurtured classical architecture, a self-conscious body of literature and letters, clubs like the Select Society, modern portraiture, magazines, journals, projects like the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and a whole host of other innovative forms.<sup>2</sup> In short, an increasingly sophisticated cultural field, with related

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and philosophy; and when the north of Scotland’s capital was reconstructed to a modern design befitting the confidence of a growing middle class and earning the epithet “modern Athens”.

<sup>2</sup> Other relevant cultural forms included: 1) periodicals and newspapers - the Foulis printing press in Glasgow, the *Caledonian Mercury*, the *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, the *Mirror*, the *Bee* and the *Lounger* in Edinburgh - all helped to forge a “public sphere” from mid-century as a space within which the tastes, desires and politics of the *literati* and landed were articulated (Dwyer, 1987; Rendall, 1978); 2) Classical music: Edinburgh’s Musical Society flourished like never before from the 1760s as an outlet for professional and amateur musicians, musical training for the wives and children of the elite and concerts in the city. St Celia’s Hall was built in 1762 for such performances and dances, with arrangements of Handel, Corelli and Geminiani, to which the most eminent members of polite society were attracted (Johnson, 1972). 3) Clubs and societies: small, semi-formal institutions which drew their membership from the ranks of the *literati* and professional classes (McElroy, 1969). Clubs such as the Select Society (Hume, Smith, Robertson, Ramsay), the Pantheon Society, the Poker Club and the Royal Society of Edinburgh were formed to plan and discuss a range of scholarly, political or frivolous topics in order to improve, civilise and reflect on the nature of modern, civil society and polite culture (Emerson, 1973; Chitnis, 1976). Such clubs not only wielded practical power in society, they actually defined what that society was - its nature, structure and development. In short, they provided the concepts and ideas that were central to the understanding of the very society that rendered their interventions meaningful.

personnel and discourses could develop and do battle with the ties that previously bound it to religion or the narrow interests of landed society.<sup>3</sup>

All this happened within a rapidly growing urban society that compacted into half a century what other countries had taken centuries to achieve (Mitchison, 1970).<sup>4</sup> By the 1780s Scotland was less the satellite economy that it had been a century before. Increasingly capital investment took place locally, producing a wider range of manufacturing goods for export from the central belt. Scottish industrialists began to pioneer the modern techniques of production essential to the industrial revolution (Devine, 1990). And Scotland's political and administrative complex was increasingly stable in the latter half of the century, feeding off and into the fertile environment of an intellectually-rendered civil society.

## **B: Culture and Civil Society in Edinburgh**

As noted, Scotland possessed a fair amount of political autonomy in the eighteenth century. The system of political management after 1707 kept intact some of the primary loci of decision-making. The impositional flow of legislation from London was certainly not overwhelming. Indeed, many of the initiatives for legislation arose from within

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<sup>3</sup> To the extent that religion no longer played the prohibitive role it had up to the seventeenth century in cultural matters, the shift towards moderatism has to be one of the prime conditions of possibility for the Enlightenment in Scotland (Smout, 1976). Calvinist extremism was tempered in the late eighteenth century as the acerbic strength of the Reformation was slowly replaced by a more "moderate" movement in religion. Whilst the traditional brand of authoritarian evangelists - doctrinal and scriptural - continued to exert a degree of influence in matters of legislation and administration (Hume's expulsion from a key university post at Edinburgh followed his avowed agnosticism), a more "intellectual" group of Enlightenment figures was moving inexorably into crucial positions of power, including the historian William Robertson, who was Principal of Edinburgh University, cleric and Moderator of the General Assembly. Repeated acts of legislation like the Toleration Act and Patronage Act, and acquittals for heresy marked a weakening of orthodoxy in the church and a turn towards "rational religion" (Dwyer, 1987). The presence of Scotland's five universities was, of course, also crucial to the enlightenment (Chitnis, 1976).

<sup>4</sup> Rates of town and city growth in Scotland were among the fastest in Europe (Devine, 1990). Glasgow's population, for instance, increased by more than 500 percent between 1755 and 1821, while Edinburgh's increased from 52,720 to 138,235 over the same period (Mitchison, 1976). From the 1740s the economic framework promoted by free trade and local resources also stimulated Scotland's commercial impulse in world markets.

Scotland itself (Paterson, 1994). In contrast to Ireland, whose manager was a British agent of central government, Scotland was ruled by what Fry (1987) has called “native Scottish surrogates”. Distinctive Scottish organizations like the previously mentioned Board of Trustees for the Encouragement of Fisheries, Agriculture and Manufactures in Scotland may have originated in British edicts, but were nonetheless comprised of local Scottish personages with a commitment to local affairs. By the late eighteenth century the Board had attempted to transform Scotland’s economy, by issuing premiums and grants to the Scottish industries and administering crown revenues from Annexed estates to industry, transport and agriculture in the Highlands. Lord Kames was a member, as was Lord Somerville, Lord Cathcart, Lord Belhaven, Robert Dundas (President of the Court of Session), Sir George Eliot and other important local figures.<sup>5</sup> With societies such as the Honourable Society of Improvers, and the Select Society, the Board took up a space within which the imperatives of an elite increasingly concerned with social and commercial progress could develop. Such organizations carried the ideational baggage of the Enlightenment, dwelling on the nature of “rich” and “poor” countries in order to shape Scotland’s political economy in line with that of its southern neighbour (Hont, 1983).<sup>6</sup>

What gave socio-political efficacy to such enlightened organizations was their compact, unified and consensus-based nature. For now, Scotland’s intelligentsia was bound firmly to sources of aristocratic power, giving it unusual weight in the spheres of politics and civil society. Long established connections between the legal profession and the old landed orders, for example, were particularly strong - to such an extent that it was

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<sup>5</sup> The linen industry was one of the Board’s main preoccupations. Since the iron works at Carron had only just been founded (in 1759), the woolen industry was still in its infancy. But the Board was determined to develop a home-grown flax industry that would kindle domestic manufacturing in general. Flax could not be cultivated as easily in Scotland as in Ireland, and the relative failures of the Board in this matter are well-known (Smout, 1983). But the failure did not distract this collective of landed and professional elite from carrying out the single-minded plan of modernization.

<sup>6</sup> Thinkers such as David Hume and Adam Smith were key players in this strategy, providing the intellectual justifications for the encouragement of staple industries, free markets and Scotland’s economic interface with stronger nations. They were also key members of Edinburgh’s plethora of clubs and societies.

often difficult to distinguish between the two groups.<sup>7</sup> What Phillipson calls the “rump of a once homogenous and highly motivated governing class” (1973: 130) melded with elements of learned and literary culture in a system of mutual support that shaped Edinburgh’s institutions, ideas and cultural products. As Rendall notes, “enlightened” Scotland “was the product of a cohesive culture, not yet fragmented” (1978: 211). And it was this social cohesion that made the Enlightenment in Edinburgh a collective and clubbable movement, with a rich patronage system and receptive audience. The fact that the ideas of Adam Smith and David Hume could so easily be operationalised in the sphere of commerce reveals the strong currency between intellectuals and those with political and economic power.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, in the eighteenth century those with political power could secure their interests in an emerging system of patronage and personal influence most visibly presided over by powerful figures such as the Scottish manager.<sup>9</sup>

In sum, the sites of power that had most effect on Scotland from local to national levels - the Sheriff, the boards, the Scottish manager, Commissioners of Supply, Parish and Royal Burghs - were based on indigenous patterns of Scottish life, and most had their origins before the Union (Paterson, 1994). Official figures such as the Duke of Argyll and

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<sup>7</sup> Lawyers, themselves, bought land and were accepted as country gentlemen, contributing, like Kames, to the transformation of the countryside. Someone like Archibald Grant of Monymusk - baronet and leading lawyer - was involved in law, high finance and landownership. Indeed Grant became embroiled in one of the most notorious financial scandals of the eighteenth century. Yet as an absent landlord, he still managed to oversee a series of improvements to his estate - enclosure, drainage and improved seed yields (Cummings, 1994). Grant was part of a new breed within the Scottish legal profession - recruited from the gentry, sons of peers and baronets, who needed a degree of business acumen in uncertain times. The confluence of landed, professional and commercial interests was, therefore, a distinctive feature of this moment (Devine, 1994).

<sup>8</sup> This compact also explains the lack of political radicalism evident in the writings of the *literati* (Devine, 1990). The governing classes, including the minor nobility and substantial gentry, possessed the power of patronage, so it made no sense for the likes of Hume and Smith to attack the system of privilege and tradition that underpinned landed power. As a result, the Scottish system of elite rule was remarkably resilient and stable, particularly after the failed Jacobite revolutions of 1715 and 1745, and especially in comparison with Ireland and France.

<sup>9</sup> Henry Dundas was Scotland’s most notorious manager. Nicknamed “Harry the ninth, uncrowned King of Scotland”, Dundas managed Scotland and its elections for the younger Pitt administration. The fact that only 3,000 men were eligible to vote in Scotland allowed the system to cohere around loyalty and bribery.



Henry Dundas may have been responsible to London, but they were certainly not enforcers of undiluted proclamations from the south. As Paterson contends, Scotland was one of the least governed small nations in Europe during the eighteenth century:

Where there was central regulation, it was imposed from Edinburgh, not London and was largely mediated through the Scottish legal system in the form of the Lord Advocate and the Sheriff. In short, it is difficult to imagine that Scottish local government in the eighteenth century - including the conflicts within it - would have looked much different had the Union never taken place. The same can be said, therefore, for the daily lives of the vast majority of the Scottish people (1994, 36).

In place, then, was a self-governing system that Paterson likens to Poggi's model of the legal state - a system co-ordinated around the formal interests of lawyers that emerged out of the enlightened absolutist structures of rule. In Britain, however, as already noted, the system of political management was never absolutist. Civil society did not emerge as a direct confrontation to a centralised and antiquated vestige of feudal rule. The space had already been opened for key members of Scottish and English society - lawyers, landowners and *literati* - to move into positions of institutional power. The unique transition to a modern system of politics in Scotland was based on the residues of an independent church, law and education. These helped to foster the Enlightenment and smoothed the gradual transition to a Scottish civil society. A semi-autonomous space of national authority emerged in the gap left by parliament, banishing the memories of Cromwellian imposition and encouraging the movement towards partnership that the Union always promised. The British state was pragmatically distant in this process - recruiting allies from afar but content after 1745 to leave matters of everyday government and institutional power to the local, modern elite. And, the local elite's most effective defence of this state of affairs was the theoretical armature of "civil society" itself as it came to be articulated in the *literati's* writings.

Scottish social theory undoubtedly changed the way societies looked at themselves. The contributions made by the Scots to the wide-ranging debates about history, wealth, progress and civilization go to the heart of the development of modern intellectual history in Europe and America (Berry, 1997). The emphasis upon the *social* as an explanatory source for questions of morality and history encouraged social and

cultural leaders to investigate the principles upon which they themselves led those societies. In Scotland the need to explain the civil basis to government and authority was made especially urgent given both the exceptional position of these leaders in the system of rule and the rapidity of socio-economic development at large. The “privileged moment” (Becker, 1994) that was the second half of the eighteenth century in Britain was firmly attached to a modern lexicon in theory. As much a self-conscious rendering of the “spirit of the age” as a description of the ground on which social development could take place, the concept of civil society was therefore central to the modernization of a range of institutions and forms, including high culture itself.

Adam Ferguson’s *An Essay on Civil Society* of 1767 was one of the first texts in Europe to set out a definition of civil society in relation to citizenship and the state. Ferguson combined tenets of civic republicanism with a theory of social change that maligned the onset of specialization and the complexification of labour. His concern centred on the perceived impact of commercial development on civil liberty, martial spirit and heroic sensibility. In the course of this Harringtonian-inspired attack, however, Ferguson conceptualised the very components of what he called “civil society” in a way that proved essential to later analyses of the state and stadial theories of progress (Marx’s debt to Ferguson is well known).

The model of civil society formulated by Ferguson entered the arena of political philosophy as an ethical vision of social life based not on a vision of cosmic order or despotic rule but on the sociality of men (Seligman, 1992). Ferguson appealed to the civic tradition in his defence of citizenship, virtue and the need for an organic militia in Scotland.<sup>10</sup> He stressed the progress of society from a state of rudeness to polished civilization with respect to the social bonds that united individuals in an intense passion of solidarity. For Ferguson (like the Union sceptic Andrew Fletcher before him) these

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<sup>10</sup> Robertson defines the civic tradition as “that body of political ideals, classical and specifically Aristotelian in origin, concerned with the phenomenon of political community in its secular and historical particularity” (1983: 138). Pocock traces its development in Renaissance thought, through Machiavelli’s articulation of *virtu* and in the English thought of Shaftesbury and Harrington. Ferguson is claimed by Pocock to be “the most Machiavellian of the Scottish disquisitions on this theme” (1975: 499).

bonds were loosened as commerce, specialization and the growth of professional armies chipped away at the primacy of sociability and the autonomous individual. The secondary (and “effeminate”) values of commerce were replacing the primary (“masculine”) ones of sociability and virtue - the ideal of which Ferguson located in the city states of Greece, the actions of the Homeric warriors and even the clans of the Highlands (Pocock, 1975; Oz-Salzberger, 1995). At base, civil society conveyed the political community of men in a state of natural citizenship. Ferguson’s contribution to this formulation was to give the whole concept of civil society an air of tension: something to be analysed and deliberated, but something under threat, something to be defended.

As the vision developed in Adam Smith’s political economy, the ideal community of individuals was one based on “natural affections and sociability” and raised the tensions between self-interest and public good inherent in the civic tradition itself (Robertson, 1983, Pocock, 1983). Smith’s more positive take on commercial modernity stressed the importance of private individuals acting independently of the state’s control in their own market interests. Their private actions, for Smith, ultimately contributed to the public good, a point already made by Mandeville’s *Fable of the Bees* in 1714. The ethics of sociability in Smith had therefore been adjusted to suit the new environment of commerce and freedom. Whilst reservation was made for the autonomous sphere of civil society in Smith, it was the spirit of commercial man rather than the impulses of orthodox civic republicanism that ensured it. In particular, members of the middling rank and the gentry were attributed the progressive role that guaranteed improvement, political pragmatism and public good. The survival of free society was placed in the hands of this commercially-minded group, forming the “impartial spectators” of the body politic and inhabiting the voluntary associations, clubs and organizations of the public sphere. As Pocock (1983) indicates, the civic tradition had been replaced by the *civil* in Smith, the military by the commercial, all rooted in an acceptance of the individual through exchange and interaction.

Hume, equally, was more embracing of commercial liberty and economic progress, leaning against Ferguson’s essay in order to elevate a vision of constitutional government that enabled individuals to pursue their self-interests. Hume’s “Idea of a

Perfect Commonwealth" (1779) was one in which personal freedom was maintained by the individual's liberty from governmental power. Civil liberty was the opposite of absolute government in Hume's scheme. The latter was characterised by excessive violence, indocility and the decay of commerce, although Hume recognized (in the essay "Of Civil Liberty") the link between monarchical absolutism and progress in the arts. The former, in contrast, guaranteed social order and commerce. "Free government" secured "the lives and properties of the citizens, to exempt one man from the dominion of another; and to protect every one against the violence or tyranny of his fellow-citizens" ("The Rise of Arts and Sciences", 1779: 118).

Hume's vision, like Smith's, owed more to the jurisprudential tradition of Grotius and Pufendorf than it did to the civic tradition as it was transposed into English thought.<sup>11</sup> This reduced the aspirations of the Scottish elite below that of the grand aristocracy and classical heroism. Emerging models of public liberty in Scotland were based less on the gallantry of the great aristocracy and more on the "mutual deference or civility" of the well educated middling ranks. As Becker (1994) suggests, lessons had been learnt from the previous century: the whole civil society tradition in Scotland was a reduction of the grand ideals of heroism, religious fanaticism and aristocratic grandeur. In its place were the "minimalist" aspirations of civil society - an informal refinement (not abundance) based in the pursuit of self-interest, energised in the associations of the public sphere. This had ramifications in styles of art, too, where the grand manner and historical painting valorised by Shaftesbury and Reynolds paled alongside the local Scottish portraiture of "empiricism". (We might recognise a similar set of circumstances dominant in the Dutch Republic during the seventeenth century, where the nobles emigrated, a theory of social classification emerged and "empirical" portraiture took off.) Replacing the hierarchic and organic terms of the traditional anagogic order was a conception of the moral order based on discrete individuals bound by the innate mutuality of humans themselves, and

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<sup>11</sup> Pocock (1983) argues that Scottish Enlightenment thought progressively broke with the civic tradition as the northern European vocabulary of commerce, property and politics yielded a more appropriate understanding of the modern political self. In particular the analysis of "man" as a "social animal" so essential to the concept of civil society had been paved by Grotius and Pufendorf in their modern theories of Natural Law.



the striving for validation in the eyes of others. Civil society was the shared social space where this exchange could be guaranteed, in turn kindling the provincial apparatuses of governance. Moreover, unlike the previous century, this space was not fractured by civil war, poverty and religious fundamentalism.

At the cultural level, civil society was claimed to encourage an improvement in taste, reason and politeness - values that could be discerned by the judgment of critics. As in England, forms of civic entertainment such as music, theatre, journals, newspapers and coffee houses were defended as forms of refined sensibility that illustrated the progress that civil society had made towards “taste” and “respectability”. Although Ferguson posited commerce and luxury as a threat to social order, the Scottish Enlightenment progressively authorised values gravitating around luxury that were so essential to high culture.

For the likes of Hume and Smith, in contrast to the “barbarians” of the past, with their indolent lifestyles, violent manners and loss of self-command, modern civilization was refined precisely because of its encouragement of polished manners, taste and polite culture. Luxury, was defended by Hume, in essays such as “Of Refinement in the Arts” (originally titled “Of Luxury” in 1752) in opposition to the moralizing discourses of orthodox civic humanism. Certainly, the luxury of which Hume spoke was not one of excessive aristocratic abundance and show, but a more “innocent” and virtuous luxury. “Wherever luxury ceases to be innocent, it also ceases to be beneficial” wrote Hume, “and when carried a degree too far, is a quality pernicious, though perhaps not the most pernicious, to political society” (“Of Refinement in the Arts”, 1779: 269). The modern conceptualization of this “beneficial” or “innocent” luxury linked private consumption to public benefits and provided the ideational justification for institutions of art, as we shall see.

Luxury was a by-word for refinement in the “gratification of the senses”; it fostered commerce and industry by increasing the pleasures and activities of human society. A new style of life was heavily implicated in this process of civility, expressing a greater responsiveness to taste in matters of music, furniture, decoration, speech, manners and art. The very townscape of New Town Edinburgh was a spatial

manifestation of this movement, built for a polite mode of living to a restrained, uniform, classical order by the likes of Robert and John Adam (Youngson, 1969).

Regardless of differences between them, then, the civil community formulated by the *literati* of the Scottish Enlightenment was a crucial root to the idea of the nation in eighteenth century Scotland itself. Inasmuch as the self-organization implied in the discourse of civil society structured the relationship between the British state and the actions of Scotland's elite, the emergent theories of a semi-autonomous realm of sociality was one that justified the *literati*'s own position as leaders of the province. What the idea of civil society meant to the thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment was a realm of solidarity held together by the force of moral sentiments and sympathies, that acted as a buffer between common subjects and centralised systems of power. The theory, as a result, concentrated the corporate identity of the intelligentsia itself and "bred a strain of socialized dependence" (Becker, 1994: xix). What better way to underscore the centrality of the elite's position in Scotland than the articulation of a modern theory that sought to explain this very society? The social theory of the Enlightenment provided a vocabulary that defined, incorporated and energised the actions of the elite in relation to culture, politics and society. As an underlying set of discourses and ideas, civil society acted as a catalyst to the cultural sphere as a whole, promoting the establishment of modern practices, institutions and forms, some of which were fully matured, others that were to reach fruition early in the next century. It was intellectual urgency that promoted cultural fermentation, theoretical engagement that provided institutional development, civil community that secured local provincial governance - all beyond the immediate control of the British state. This goes, also, for the fine arts.

### **C: The Field of Artistic Production in Late Eighteenth-Century Edinburgh**

The question of artistic development is one that must be posed in relation to the overall status of key elements that comprised the art world in the late eighteenth century. This period has been termed "the golden age" by Duncan Macmillian (1986) and it is certainly a veritable gold-mine of artists, patrons, collectors and critics compared to earlier times. As one might expect the period is riddled with multiple tendencies that connect the

coming modernity with an older system of training and patronage. Increasingly, however, fine art in this period breaks with the ties of a pre-modern past and develops in a sphere increasingly bounded by the values of professionalism, civic virtue, distinction and refinement - the values of civil society. The following section attempts to explore the development of these values in relation to features that were fast crystallizing into an art field in late eighteenth-century Edinburgh. In particular this section will deal with collecting, training, portraiture, landscape painting and the role of critics. In each case the complex forces that acted on the visual arts helped to expand the range of possibilities available to artists, consumers and critics, although exhibition space was still limited in this period.

*i) Collecting, Engraving and the Rise of Academies in Scotland*

One of the key ingredients in the movement towards a self-sufficient art world was the formation of larger and more varied collections in Scotland. The relative failure of epic, historical and grand manner pictures in Scotland tended to compress collections within a range that excluded the “highest” branches of art as the hierarchy of genres had defined it. So aspiring artists of the classical historical style such as Gavin Hamilton had to leave Edinburgh for Rome to search for patronage (in this case from the Borghese family). However, collections of fine art in Scotland did start to reveal the elite’s aspirations towards intellectual and artistic sophistication. Collecting also fed off the burgeoning network of associations between dealers, collectors and critics that formed between the Dutch Republic, Rome and Edinburgh. As a result artists were provided with more extensive material from which to copy or study; and particular collections formed the basis to the foundation of art academies and, later, the National Gallery of Scotland itself.

The collecting of old masters was a regular practice for the Grand Tour educated elite of Britain by the second half of the eighteenth century. Agents abroad, such as Andrew Wilson, occupied the role of *cognoscente* and purchased pictures, medals and antiques for the growing private collections of the wealthy. In Scotland various collections were shaped and sustained by aristocrats, professionals and artists, some to be bequeathed to Scotland’s national institutions of art early in the nineteenth century

(Thompson, 1972). The collection of the portraitist Allan Ramsay, for instance, was a valuable mix of drawings, prints and engravings of works culled from various trips to Italy in the mid to late eighteenth century. Additions were made steadily to the collection by Allan's son John, who obtained a cluster of eighteenth century French paintings by Watteau, Greuze, Lancret and Boucher. John Ramsay (unrelated) mixed with Scottish artists and agents in Rome at the turn of the century and became an active collector of pictures, pottery, bronzes and marbles, favouring the style of seventeenth century Dutch genre and detailed figure subjects. It was this collection that was to later form the Lady Murray bequest to the National Gallery of Scotland.

Another Georgian collection later to be bequeathed to the National Gallery was the mix of pictures, marbles and bronzes of Sir James Erskine of Torrie. Sir William Erskine (1728-1795) was the first member of the family to collect pictures and commissioned some modern works by David Allan, including a large conversation piece set in the grounds of the Torrie House, Fife. It was Sir William's son, Sir James Erskine, however, who was the driving force behind the formation of the Torrie collection in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Sir James was described as "an eminent art critic and patron [who] collected Dutch and other masterpieces" (Dunimarle Castle Catalogue, quoted in Williams, 1992: 163). His collection comprised of Dutch, Flemish and Italian pictures of a generalised style, including landscapes by Jacob Ruisdael, genre scenes by Teniers and smaller works by Italian artists such as Veronese, Rosa and Dughet (Thompson, 1972). The Earl of Hopetoun was continuing to adorn Hopetoun House with Italian and Dutch pictures, particularly classical landscapes, some of which were to be exhibited in Edinburgh early in the next century; and the Nisbet Hamilton Ogilvy collection at Mansion House, East Lothian included a range of pictures from different schools including Italian paintings from the Mattei collection in Rome, acquired by William Hamilton Nisbet on his Grand Tour (Williams, 1992).

The penchant for Dutch genre and portraiture, a result of the religious, political and ideological affiliations between the two countries clearly satisfied civil society's impulse towards the detailed, restrained and "empirical". Robert Alexander, an Edinburgh banker and patron owned a considerable number of Dutch paintings including



Rembrandt's *Judas Repentant, Returning the Pieces of Silver*. A sale of his collection in 1775 "brought from his late residence in Edinburgh" at Christie's in London included landscapes by Keirincx, Cuyp and Ruisdael, with a total of one hundred and forty four lots (Williams, 1992). Dutch pictures were owned and housed in Scotland by the Dukes of Buccleuch and Queensberry. There were Rembrandts, Ruisdaels and Ostades at Dalkeith Palace and Drumlanrig Castle; and arguably the greatest collection of seventeenth century Dutch paintings in Britain was that of the Third Earl of Bute, Prime Minister between 1762-3. This was housed in the Adam-style Luton Hoo but influenced collectors, critics and artists throughout Britain (Williams, 1992).

To say Dutch art was civil society's equivalent to grand manner is perhaps overstating the issue: collections also contained Flemish, Italian and French pictures. But it is interesting that pictures from the Netherlands formed the core to growing scholarly collections such as those of the universities of Glasgow and Edinburgh. Enlightened Scottish artists emulated the sombre tones, detail and realism of Dutch genre pieces and portraiture; critics lauded the naturalism, taste, and controlled handling of the Dutch national style; and Scottish collectors tended to start off their collections with a Rembrandt, Cuyp or Hals, to "set the tone" without overstating the effect.<sup>12</sup> All of this made sense in relation to the Protestant anxieties surrounding superabundance and the affirmation of a civic identity, energised in civil society itself, that was socially beneficial, but restrictive. What is clear is that the activities and aspirations of Scotland's elite were crucial to the building of collections as units of artistic development into which the Dutch republic of taste was woven. And although country house collections remained within the private remit of the landed, and often still displayed according to an older rationale

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<sup>12</sup> David Wilkie summarized the desire succinctly: "all collectors begin with Dutch pictures" (quoted in Williams, 1992: 18). The emphasis on the restrained but instructive feature of Dutch domestic pictures is further evident in Scottish genre artist, David Allan's quip that "the humbler walk of painting, which consists in the just representation of ordinary life (by which, it is believed, the best moral effects may be often produced" could substitute for the lack of "public and great works in the historical line". "Without descending to mean and low objects" Allan continued, "it is possible, by a strict adherence to truth and nature, to produce compositions which, though not so striking as the sublimer efforts of the pencil are yet capable of pleasing and instructing in the highest degree" (quoted in Macmillan, 1986: 68).

derived from the logic of decoration or ceremony, their existence was a condition of possibility for national art institutions, academies and the later formation of the National Gallery.<sup>13</sup>

At the more popular end of collecting, and as significant in the commercialisation of art, was the increased popularity of engraving amongst the middle classes in Edinburgh. A system of mass production had been formed, with London at the centre, that circulated prints to the provinces (Solkin, 1993). Domestic print collections were common in Edinburgh and were distributed through second-hand sales and booksellers. Prints varied enormously, from famous British portraits, historical pictures (Benjamin West's "Death of General Wolfe" for instance) and the work of Hogarth, to seascapes and copies of old masters. Independent engravers such as John Kay had established businesses in Scotland's capital by 1780s, providing the middle-rank market with portrait miniatures of well-known characters and scenes from everyday civic life (Nenadic, 1997). The Scottish portraitist Allan Ramsay, similarly, sold engravings of his works through his father's bookshop, many of which were advertised for sale in Edinburgh's newspapers.

Nenadic (1997) describes the rise of print collecting in Scotland as an interface between this expansion of print production and distribution in the provinces, the British middle classes' desire for luxury goods as a whole and the social-symbolic function that prints were fulfilling in everyday life. Engravings had a variety of social uses for Edinburgh's middle classes. Once glazed and framed they were combined with a room's existing ornamentation and used as decorative "furniture" prints. The dining room, in particular, was a locus of domestic sociality by mid-century and prints were a symbolic addition to the "luxury" items that were assembled there. Engravings may have suggested particular political or religious affiliations. Portraits of Oliver Cromwell, Mary, Queen of Scots and King Charles I, for instance, were quite common in Scottish houses. But as Nenadic writes, "the expansion and increasing sophistication of print production and

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<sup>13</sup> Moreover, active patrons such as the Earl of Wemyss did begin to embrace a more modern approach to collecting and displaying pictures. The Earl modified the layout of particular rooms at Amisfield and Gosford, East Lothian, for instance, to suit the pictures themselves, as opposed to doctoring, cutting, commissioning or buying pictures to suit a pre-existing ambience (Gow, 1992).

supply mirrored a rising popular demand to see and to own works of art” (1997: 209). On the one hand, prints were one way in which a thirst for art was satisfied, and a means whereby the owners’ cultural capital was displayed. The spacious rooms of Edinburgh’s New Town were perfect for such a display:

In addition to their role in a complex political discourse, the pictures spoke eloquently of the intellectual and cultural claims of the householder, as man of letters, familiar with science, literature, music or theatre. The Enlightenment ambition to see human affairs as a progressive process, based in stages of history and in the power of the individual to shape history, is signalled through the presence of historical portraits. Claims to a classical education and an appreciation of the aesthetics of fine art - attributes which were not, in any real sense, available to the mass of the middling sort of people - were suggested by the subject matter of many of the classical and allegorical old master engravings (1997, 218).

On the other hand, however, the consumption of prints was an increasingly “privatized” act that fed off the trend towards bourgeois domesticity. It is possible, therefore, that the rise of collecting also diluted the impulse towards the public exhibition of pictures and militated against the formation of national spaces for exhibition as a whole in late eighteenth century Edinburgh. The retreat into the spaces of bourgeois domestic civility, away from public display was, of course, one feature of the shift from medieval ceremony to modern civil society. What the building of the New Town, the movement into the drawing room and the collecting of aesthetic vignettes indicated was a “withdrawal from public space into exclusive balls, private repasts, and...cookbooks devoted to the gourmet” (Becker, 1994: 63).<sup>14</sup> At one level, then, public exhibitions may have been short-circuited by domestic collections. At another, however, the very emphasis attached to the fine arts as a realm of dinner conversation, judgment and connoisseurship was essential to its modern trajectory.<sup>15</sup> It is exactly the kind of arrangement suggested by

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<sup>14</sup> The decline of ceremonial display, the intensification of familial relations and the “privatization” of death and bereavement are other indicators of this shift towards bourgeois domesticity.

<sup>15</sup> The question of “luxury” and its relation to consumption was one that dogged Scottish morality during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Dwyer, 1987). Luxury could always be justified, however, if the basis to that consumption grew out of the moderate and virtuous values of Scotland’s leaders - in this case the free market and the notion that certain forms of luxury

David Allan's picture *The Connoisseurs*, for instance, where the educated protagonists, probably lawyers, deliberate over a classical print in the relaxed, but austere space of a New Town drawing room.

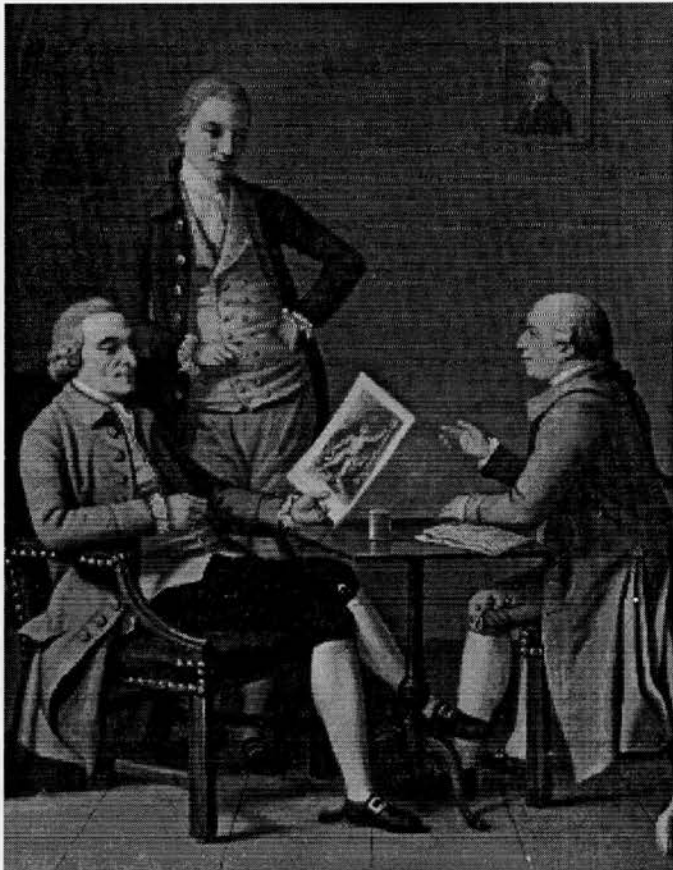


Figure 31: *The Connoisseurs*, David Allan, 1770s

Moreover, engraving was also a crucial stimulus to artists themselves, constituting the study material of some of Scotland's developing academies.

Modern art fields at the very least required some places for artistic training, and the development of academies such as those in Paris and London were crucial both to the overall socialization and support of artists and the centralization of official art in the metropolis. Different academies emerged at different speeds in reaction to different

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were “beneficial” (Nenadic, 1994). Hence the moral ambiguities inherent in collecting art works or prints - as a potentially “effeminate”, frivolous and excessive undertaking - faded as a set of modern ideas seeped through the institutions and practices of Scotland's cities. Indeed the possession of print collections became one way in which a refined, enlightened, and metropolitan sensibility was fashioned.



influences, of course (Pointon and Binski, 1997). But all secreted a set of dominant conventions that spoke of the power of particular social groups to set the rules of orthodox artistic production and appreciation (Bourdieu, 1993). In the eighteenth century, Scotland witnessed several attempts at founding an academy, only one of which, the Trustees Academy, acquired any degree of permanence, and all of which were less centralised expressions of a “state” or high tradition than those in existence on the continent and, to a lesser extent, England. The short-lived Academy of St Luke’s in Edinburgh has already been mentioned, but another attempt was made in Glasgow from the 1750s to the 1770s.

The brothers Robert and Andrew Foulis were publishers and printers but also founded an academy in 1754 for the purpose of training and educating young artists. Painters such as David Allan were instructed in drawing and studies from the antique from a collection acquired in Holland and Paris by the brothers in the early 1750s (Miles, 1962; Thompson, 1972). These included Dutch works and French pictures in the classical style and engravings of well-known works in the Italian, Flemish and German schools. Students were also given the opportunity to study pictures in the Duke of Hamilton’s collection and make prints after the collection. Once a year from 1761 until 1776 the Foulis collection was exhibited, out-of-doors, in the quadrangle of the Old College until the collection was sold.



Figure 32a: The Inner Quadrangle of Glasgow College with Exhibition of Paintings Mounted by Foulis Brothers, c. 1762, engraving by David Allan

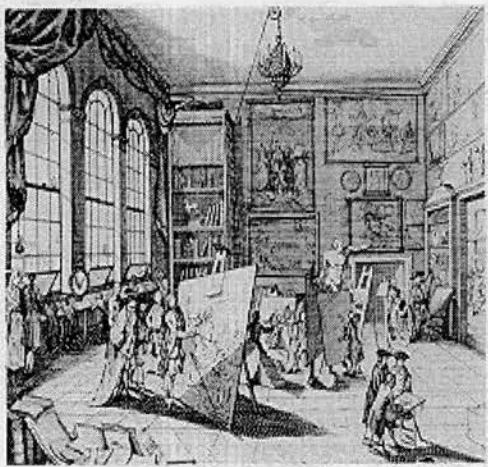


Figure 32b: The Foulis Academy, Glasgow, c. 1762, engraving by David Allan

Interestingly, the justification for such display was couched in terms of what art could do for the amelioration of manufactures in Scotland rather than in terms reserved for art itself. To local commercial and industrial patrons the Foulis brothers found it necessary to “represent...to them [art] as a finer kind of manufacture, that would take a longer time to...produce profit, but that in the end would make full amends for the delay, by affording more ample profits, because the manufactures were not produced from dear materials” (quoted in Miles, 1962: 26-27). The lack of support and public funds in the west eventually scuppered the project of the academy, and no more exhibitions were staged in Glasgow for more than a generation. But the academy’s practical and commercial tempo was taken up by another academy, this time in Scotland’s capital.

The Trustees’ Academy was Scotland’s first permanent art institution. It was also the first arts organization in Britain to receive parliamentary support, in the form of the £2,000 annuity issued by its parent institution, the Board of Manufactures.<sup>16</sup> Under the potent vision that the production of luxury goods was a worthy and beneficial activity, the Board established a drawing academy in 1760 for improvements in design for household goods, in order to make such objects of utility attractive for export and to satisfy demand for luxury goods in the wake of the building of the New Town (Nenadic, 1994). In 1786, when the Trustees took stock of the achievements of the school, they recalled that it had been set up “on account of the difficulties which the general Manufactures of Damask, printed Linen, Carpets, and other flowered Goods laboured under for the want of new and elegant Patterns” (quoted in Smailes, 1991: 126). The practical dimension to the Trustees’ Academy is significant here to the extent that it fed off tendencies in Scottish civil society towards commercial development and the cautious

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<sup>16</sup> It would be a mistake, here, to see the academy as a surrogate agent of a centralised British state. Like the Board itself, the Trustees’ Academy relied on Scotland’s own personnel and the impulses of Edinburgh’s civil society as a whole. The initial suggestion for its existence, for example, came from the enlightened landowner-lawyer, Lord Kames, as a means of improving the design of linen. It was from the outset, then, a commercial undertaking, backed by official funds, but which received little attention south of the border. As Minihan writes, “the annuity was granted for commercial purposes and, once granted in perpetuity, its administration over the years attracted the interests of few M.Ps. English legislators would doubtless have been surprised to learn that an important precedent was being modestly set north of the border” (1977: 9).

application of thought to matters practical. On the one hand this was the affirmation of commercial civil society over classic civic humanism, or at least a combination of modern aristocratic notions of improvement with bourgeois aspirations towards industry. The design of domestic products was authorised in relation to enlightened principles of market competition, specialization and the division of labour that were current in Smith's influential *Wealth of Nations*, for instance. On the other hand, the scaling down of heroic ambitions and the shunning of high expectation in civil society reduced the academy's remit to practical initiatives rather than to large-scale support for grand manner pictures like at the Royal Academy. The first master of the academy, for instance, was the Frenchman William Delacour, an Edinburgh-based portraitist, decorative painter and designer of theatre sets, and the first pupils were mainly apprentice tradesmen - gilders, weavers, embroiders and housepainters.

Increasingly, however, the Academy's remit widened to encompass aspects of fine art in distinction to that provided under the auspices of commercial design. Successive masters at the academy were proven artists in their own right as well as renowned teachers in design. Alexander Runciman and David Allan were incumbents of the post in 1772 and 1786 respectively. And in 1798, the painter John Graham, as manager, introduced a painting class, using a collection of old master prints and casts from the antique. The Trustees themselves were moved to note that "several artists of very considerable merit received the Rudiments of their education at the academy - Jacomy More [Jacob More], landscape Painter now at Rome, Messrs Brown [John Brown], Erskine, Nasmyth [Alexander Nasmyth], Caldwell, and other Portrait Painters are of the number" (quoted in Smailes, 1991: 126). Indeed, it was under Graham's regime that artists such as David Wilkie, William Allan and John Watson Gordon learnt to draw and paint for a more open market. By 1799 the *Edinburgh Evening Courant* was advertising for aspiring professional artists to attend the new academy under Graham, resident in a studio in St James's Square, which was to be "furnished with copies of the finest Statues and Busts from the Antique; in which it is proposed, as far as may be found practicable, to conduct the studies of those attending it, upon the plan of the Royal Academy in London" (quoted in Smailes, 1991: 127). At the same time, however,

regulations for the status of the Academy directed masters every year to submit two industrial designs for the benefit of Scottish manufacturers. A duality of purpose was therefore inherent in the academy from the start; and whilst this fitted with the social mix of enlightened culture as a whole, such a tension eventually fractured the academy (and the art field itself), pulled between a professional defence of art for art's sake and a more circumspect connection of art to commerce. For now, though, the old and the new nestled, rather than jostled with one another.

*ii) Portraiture: Ramsay to Raeburn*

A roll-call of Scottish portraiture towards the end of the eighteenth century would produce quite an impressive array of artistic forms, from pendants and medallions, through literary portraits, engraved portraits and animal portraiture. With landscape painting, portraiture was the most popular genre in Scotland. The expansion of the art market at the turn of the century inserted portraiture into a network of commerce that linked a thirst for individualizing detail and the social need for personal ownership with an increasingly sophisticated system of production. And though Edinburgh did not challenge London as a centre of portraiture, the city played host to some of the most notable portraitists of the period - Allan Ramsay and Henry Raeburn in particular.

The relative autonomy of portraiture from the hierarchy of genres (its ambiguous status as reportage, for instance) assigned to it a sense of aesthetic ambiguity that Steiner describes as a "general artistic problem" or "overt conflict" between "the aesthetic versus the referential" (quoted in Pointon, 1993: 8). It was a problem that transcended the status of particular artists and styles to become a question at the very heart of collecting and the later formation of the national gallery itself: namely, are portraits to be commissioned, collected and displayed for aesthetic reasons, for the renown of the sitter or for the purpose of personal record? In late eighteenth-century Scotland, the presence of this ambiguity was for the moment less pressing because of the absence of a Royal Academy and high patronage. The practice of portraiture was therefore one that could flourish relatively unchecked, to expand into the space fostered by a growing demand for detailed representations of human subjects to themselves. Portraiture in Scotland was in fact



validated by the emphasis on distinction, conviviality, empiricism and social enquiry that was at the heart of the enlightenment and civil society itself.

Allan Ramsay's connections with the *literati* are well known (Emerson, 1973; Smart, 1992, Macmillan, 1986), and his father's stature as the national poet of *The Gentle Shepherd* has been mentioned. Ramsay rendered some of the best known portraits of significant figures of the eighteenth century, including Rousseau and Hume, although the search for proper training and patronage forced the portraitist for long periods to Rome (1736-8) and to London (1733).<sup>17</sup>

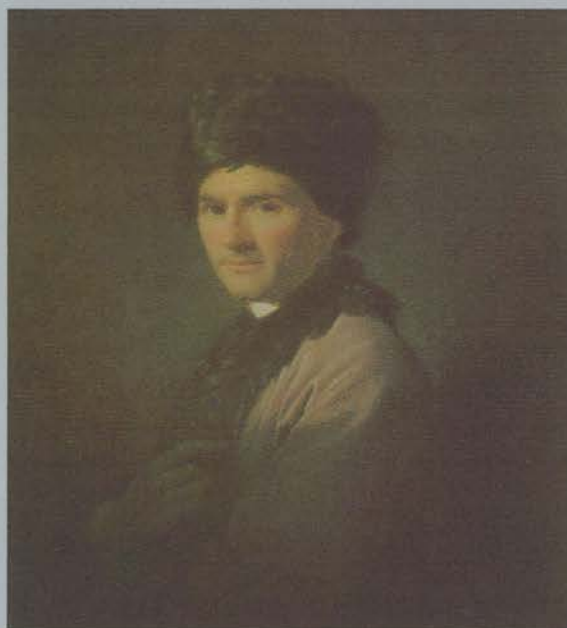


Figure 33: *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, Allan Ramsay, 1766

Much of Ramsay's work in London was of a style and tempo that placed it alongside the grand, formal portraits of Reynolds and Kneller. He was therefore known as a portraitist of high society - politicians, nobles and royalty. Ramsay's connections with Hogarth, however, by whom he was taught at St Martin's Lane, indicated a more naturalistic and informal approach to paintings. Whilst using stock poses - formal, imposing, and ideal - to paint the likes of his grand Scottish patrons the Duke of Argyll and the Earl of Bute

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<sup>17</sup> It is a mark, still, in fact, of the relative underdevelopment of the mid eighteenth-century art world in Scotland that the market was neither rich nor stable enough to sustain more than one portraitist.

(both resident in London, the latter Ramsay's primary champion on becoming Prime Minister), Ramsay also painted in a more intimate and flexible style. This indicated a turn towards the preoccupations of the enlightenment: benevolent good feeling, sociability, civility and rationality.

By the time Ramsay's rival, Reynolds, had returned from Italy in 1753 the Scot was compelled to seek patronage once again in Edinburgh.<sup>18</sup> It was from this time that Ramsay became a founding member of the Select Society and contributed, with Hume, to the unfolding of the enlightenment in Scotland's capital. As well as corresponding with Diderot, Ramsay wrote tracts on taste, politics and philosophy, and earned Dr Johnson's praise: "I love Ramsay, You will not find a man in whose conversation there is more instruction, more information, and more elegance, than in Ramsay's" (quoted in Holloway, 1989: 136). Ramsay's *Dialogue on Taste*, for example, followed his *On Ridicule* as a speculative venture into aspects of theology, literary style and naturalism. This essay, published in Edinburgh in the mid 1750s, lauded the growth of science and the decline of traditional metaphysics. Addisonian philosophy, in particular, was attacked for its emphasis on the *agreeable* and its lack of attention to "Truth as the leading and inseparable principle in all...works of art". Instead, "The *agreeable*...", Ramsay declared, "cannot be separated from the *exact*; and the posture, in a painting, must be a *just resemblance* of what is graceful in nature, before it can hope to be esteem'd *graceful*" (quoted in Smart, 1992: 100).

Pictures of the mid 1750s such as *Hew Dalrymple*, *Lord Drummorie* depict the sitter in this natural state, as moderate, learned, eloquent and civil. A good deal of portraiture was intended for some form of public disposition and therefore sitters had to be portrayed with qualities befitting their social role. This is particularly true of professionals whose portraits were often displayed within the hospitals, banks, universities and board rooms of Edinburgh.

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<sup>18</sup> Ramsay's work attracted the attention of engravers and his portraits would have been well known in Edinburgh even though many of them were never commissioned or displayed there. Ramsay's portraits of public figures - the Duke of Argyll, the Earl of Hopetoun or Sir John Clerk of Penicuik, for instance, were engraved and disseminated by London-based Faber to the provinces and would have enlarged the painter's reputation quite considerably (Smart, 1992).



Figure 34: *Sir Hew Dalrymple, Lord Drummore*, Allan Ramsay, 1754

Membership of Scotland's civil elite was marked by a kind of personal immortalization in portraiture and the emphasis on "interior" qualities connoted by the setting, the clothes and the gestures, secured this membership. It made no sense for the *literati* to be shown in full classical regalia, in the elevated manner of Reynolds, for instance, because this connoted a realm of high sentiments, baroque idealism and aristocratic social association that civil society was attempting to transcend. The scaling down of heroic ambition that was current in civil society as a whole, therefore translated into the irrelevancy in Edinburgh of *istoria* as the style to which portraiture should aspire, and perhaps literally into Ramsay's shift from full-lengths to half and three-quarter lengths.<sup>19</sup> Ramsay was perfectly suited to a more modest, informal, direct (and cheaper) style, the essence of which was enlightenment empiricism and Hume's philosophy of mind - the separation of

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<sup>19</sup> This, in turn, by-passed the nuances of gentlemanly deportment - particularly the position of the feet, which had to be shown turned outwards to signify aristocratic elegance (Smart, 1992).



*impressions and ideas*, for instance.<sup>20</sup>



Figure 35: *David Hume*, Allan Ramsay, 1754

There are few abstractions in the portraits of Ramsay’s “second style” in Edinburgh, only a directness based on observation and intimacy (Smart, 1992).<sup>21</sup> Rarely did Ramsay paint anything that stretched beyond the perceived: he painted through the lens of rational anti-idealism that drew on contemporary French realism (of La Tour, for instance),

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<sup>20</sup> “All the perceptions of the human mind resolve themselves into two distinct kinds, which I call impressions and ideas. The difference betwixt them consists in the degree of force and liveliness with which they strike upon the mind, and make their way into our thought or consciousness. Those perceptions which enter with most force and violence, we may name impressions, and under this name I comprehend all our sensations, passions, and emotions, as they make their first appearance in the soul. By ideas, I mean the faint images of these in thinking and reasoning; such, for instance, are all the perceptions excited by the present discourse, excepting only those which arise from the sight and touch, and excepting the immediate pleasure or uneasiness it may occasion” (quoted in McCosh, 1875, <http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/text/mccosh/mc-19.htm>: 11-12).

<sup>21</sup> Smart calls this “Ramsay’s gradual move away from the artificialities of the post-Kneller tradition in England towards the unaffected informality to which contemporary French painting was tending” (1992: 88). Baroque grandiloquence and bold contrasts of tone are replaced by relaxed naturalism, stylistic quietism and subtle uses of lighting.



Rembrandt's handling of light and shadow and Hume's stress on observation. In the same way that Hume's philosophy commenced with the impressions of knowledge or objects, so Ramsay's portraiture seemed to belong to the realm of sense data and to the experiential. As Macmillan writes:

Ramsay's subtlety and precision is based on his use of drawing as an instrument of analysis and of light as the essential medium of natural vision: in these things he differs from...his rival Reynolds in England. They are qualities which constitute an empirical naturalism that is very close indeed to Hume's. (1984c: 26)

Ramsay's later work, on his return to London, once more embraced the official patina of grand manner and high sentiment. He painted George, Prince of Wales, for instance, and succeeded to the Office of the King's Painter, after 1760, from which time he monopolised the market in formal portraiture. He withdrew from painting in 1773, denigrated by Reynolds as a man "of remarkable good sense, yet not a good painter" (quoted in Macmillan, 1986: 29). Despite the less "certain" and "empirical" style of Ramsay's late pictures his influence on the art field in Scotland was marked, not just by his contribution to civil society but also by his influence on aspiring artists such as Henry Raeburn, David Martin and Alexander Nasmyth.

Indeed it is to Raeburn that we must turn to understand the trajectory of portraiture and the art field in later eighteenth century Edinburgh. He was certainly the heir to the "natural" style in portraiture which Ramsay had pioneered and was possibly the first Scottish artist to be lauded in Anglo-European circles despite working for most of his life in Edinburgh. Raeburn's output straddled the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and his pictures reflected the mix of influences and styles associated with both. He formed an early awareness of Reynolds' formal portraiture, and had contact with the Academy's leader during a brief period in London. But he was also drawn to the informal renderings of Ramsay's second style, and the "matter-of-factness" of his work from the 1790s on suggests an understanding of second-generation enlightenment philosophy. That Raeburn was able to sustain his portrait business in Edinburgh further indicates the movement towards professionalization and modernity in the art field as a whole. In fact by the early years of the next century it was Raeburn who helped build studios, found

artistic organizations and develop modern systems of patronage in the interests of artistic autonomy in Scotland's capital.

The son of a manufacturer, Raeburn began his working life in 1772 as a goldsmith and engraver, but became a pupil of the Edinburgh portraitist David Martin and progressed from miniatures to oils, eventually supplanting Martin as the city's chief portraitist. At the height of his popularity Raeburn was taking around four sitters a day, for up to an hour and a half each and for four or five sittings (Armstrong, 1888). He painted the most notorious and influential Scotsmen of the day, including Viscount Melville, William Robertson, David Hume, Sir Walter Scott, James Boswell, Adam Smith, Hugh Blair, Lord Kames and Francis Jeffrey. In 1784 Raeburn left for Rome on Reynolds' advice but returned to Edinburgh in 1787, and stayed for thirty-six years. His marriage in 1780 to a rich widow delivered financial security to Raeburn, and his subsequent ventures into landownership (Youngson, 1966) matched him socially with many of the subjects of his portraiture: the mix of aristocracy, lesser gentry and professionals that led Scottish civil society as a whole. Included in this number were the Spencers of Althorp who had recommended Raeburn to Sir Joshua Reynolds as a miniature painter and the influence of the English portrait style is indicated by Raeburn's early use of full-lengths (Macmillan, 1986).



Figure 36: *Dr Nathaniel Spens*, Sir Henry Raeburn, 1791

The historic figure style of Renaissance and classical art was not directly emulated in Raeburn's work, yet pictures such as *Lord President Dundas* (1787) and *Dr Nathaniel Spens* (1791) do indicate an acknowledgement of the grand style that higher patrons would have found flattering. Such a style, however, did not easily fit with the ideals of most of Raeburn's patrons, particularly members of the *literati*. Increasingly, the ideals of high English portraiture were replaced by adherence to exact details and informality in a style that was more naturalistic, but which still valorized the leadership of Scotland's elite.



Figure 37: *Neil Gow*, Sir Henry Raeburn, c. 1793

Raeburn's *Neil Gow*, for instance, is a direct and intimate depiction of one of Scotland's most renowned fiddle players which lacks the idealist flourishes of before. The setting is restrained; the glossy finesse of the landscape of *Dr Nathaniel Spens* is replaced by the dark interiors of Dutch pictures, of Rembrandt and Hals in particular. And although Raeburn occasionally re-used the grand style for higher Scottish patrons, his portraits from the late eighteenth century - of Lord Newton, Isabella McLeod and the Glasgow



philosopher Thomas Reid, for instance - frame the status of the sitter within the restrained exactitudes of enlightened civility.

Indeed Thomas Reid's analysis of the role of intuition, of the immediacy of perception and of the mechanics of visual appearance may well have percolated into Raeburn's portraiture, here. Raeburn was cognizant of the interpretation given by Reid's pupil Dugald Stewart to the distinction between the appearance of objects and our knowledge of them. According to Macmillan (1986), Raeburn's portraits of the late eighteenth century conveyed the will to record the bare manifestations of visibility: of appearance over the notion of the object, of the perceived rather than the inferred, of intuition rather than analysis. This was expressed in Raeburn's austere observed figures, his rejection of elaborate surroundings and his recording of patterns of contour and light which eschewed continuities of surface or form (Macmillan, 1986). At the very least, Raeburn's contact with figures of the later enlightenment would have lent support to his movement towards a restrained and empirical portraiture synchronous with Edinburgh's "age of reason" as a whole. Indeed that changes in enlightenment philosophy were being incorporated into Raeburn's work is indicated by his gradual acceptance of the role of intuition as a basis to "common-sense" perception and his movement away from the burden of representing the known rather than the perceived (Macmillan, 1986).

It is clear that Raeburn felt under-supported in Edinburgh and thought the city exiguous in its patronage (in a letter to Wilkie, Raeburn likens practicing in Edinburgh to living at the Cape of Good Hope). In reality, however, Raeburn, and other portraitists such as George Watson (1767-1837) and Archibald Skirving (1749-1819) enjoyed sturdier structures of artistic production than any Scottish artists up to that time. The market for portraiture in Scotland was such that Raeburn produced well-nigh six hundred paintings, commissioned by the country's expanding middle and upper middle classes. As well as painting, the demand for portraiture was satisfied by a mix of engravings, medallions, and other keepsakes produced, in chief, by artisans based in London. The Glasgow-born James Tassie, for instance, produced small portrait medallions based on a technique of enamelling developed at the Foulis Academy in the late 1750s, where



Tassie studied with David Allan.<sup>22</sup> A growing chain of art world agents was developing in Scotland, and portraitists were in contact with Rome-based Scottish dealers such as James Byres and Andrew Wilson.



Figure 38a: James Byres, Art Dealer, glass paste by James Tassie, c. 1780



Figure 38b: Robert Foulis, Publisher and Patron of the Arts, glass paste by James Tassie, c. 1770

By the early years of the nineteenth century Raeburn was able to open his own studio and gallery at York Place, which included a novel system of shutters that varied light. In 1815 he was elected Royal Academician, in 1822 he was knighted by George IV on his visit to Edinburgh, and the following year appointed the King’s Limner and Painter for Scotland. Most importantly for the next chapter, in 1808 Raeburn helped to found a professional association of Scottish painters, the “Society of Artists”, with yearly exhibitions of modern work at his studio. This was an important catalyst to the development of the art field in that the “autonomous” interests of modern artists were beginning to take offence against the “outmoded” tastes of the older, aristocratic patrons. Part of Raeburn’s legacy, therefore, was to help shape the relationship between artists and patrons in a way that introduced a dynamic principle at the heart of the field - that of conflict.

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<sup>22</sup> By the end of the 1770s Tassie was Britain’s leading portrait modeller and even enjoyed the patronage of Catherine the Great (Holloway, 1986). Tassie’s agent abroad was Byres, who put British tourists to Rome in touch with the medallionist to obtain copies of important gems, coins and pottery on their return (Holloway, 1978). A collection of Tassie moulds, coins and medals was bequeathed to the National Gallery of Scotland in 1860 by James’ nephew William, although the aesthetic ambiguity of this collection (both as portraiture and as “craft”) was a problem that vexed the Trustees of the Gallery.

### *iii) Landscape Painting*

An understanding of the changing ways in which the Scottish landscape was depicted is central to an analysis of the art field itself. Like portraiture, landscape painting in Scotland was a potent mix of traditional and modern styles that summed up the greater diversity and variety possible in the Scottish art world. This diversity is all the more impressive when it is borne in mind that very few landscapes were painted in Scotland before the middle of the eighteenth century for the reasons outlined in chapter four. The first painters to paint Scottish landscapes were foreign artists, decorative craftsmen like the Nories and various itinerants (Holloway, 1978). Despite the desires of Edinburgh's own painters for "artistic" as opposed to "artisanal" patronage, individuals working in the landscape idiom often took their employment in relation to the symbolic needs of an increasingly prosperous aristocracy. Tasks included decorating town and country houses, carrying out topographies of country seats and providing ornamentation for gardens or pleasure grounds. As an alternative, artists were involved as set designers for the theatre; they provided "realistic" landscape backdrops for the stage (Holloway, 1978). By the end of the century, however, landscape was one of the most popular genres in Scotland. Depictions of the Scottish countryside had shifted from generalised panoramas in the classical idiom to the more particular evocations of mood and rugged scenery that paved the way for the romantic trope of the 1820s-1850s. And landscapists were being sustained less and less by the direct aristocratic commission that reduced them to the status of artisan. These shifts fed into and off shifts both in the patronage of art and the nature of the art consuming public in general.

Given the crucial role played by Scottish civil society, it is ironic that one of the first representations of Scottish landscape grew out of a commission from the British state. The direct bind of power and landscape representation was expressed in attempts by the English draughtsman and co-founder of the Royal Academy, Paul Sandby, to provide the British government with maps, surveys and views of key Scottish sites. In the wake of the Jacobite rebellions the state needed topographical information in order to strengthen its defence north of the border; and an important factor in the formation of the nation-state was cartography as a form of power/knowledge (Harley, 1988). Sandby's

remit from the state was to illustrate the position of strategic castles and sites that could be used as military installations if the need arose, and to provide information on possible road building programmes (Holloway, 1978). As a sideline he drew panoramas of Edinburgh and the Forth and was commissioned in 1751 by the Duke of Queensberry for a landscape of his estate. Sandby was also involved in the intellectual life of Edinburgh, mixing with the likes of Robert Adam, and disseminating his engravings of Scottish views and visual interpretations of Ramsay's *The Gentle Shepherd* to an emerging middle class public. For the most part, such representations at mid-century were no different to those current in England; they depicted broad, undramatic, Lowland views that were becoming popular items of consumption at a time when retreat from the urban was increasingly sought in the idealised purity of Scottish ruralism (Noble, 1982).

Service-based Edinburgh provided ample opportunities for craftsmen such as cabinet makers, coach-painters and upholsterers. The apprentice system was still dominant in landscape work for most of the eighteenth century and apprenticed artisans like Charles Steuart, Alexander Runciman, Jacob More and William Delacour were contracted for decorative commissions in the city's town houses, particularly after the New Town was erected. In addition, the building of Adam-style country houses after the Union was a stimulus for landscape painting. Emulating other European aristocracies, the post-Union Scottish landed elite had a penchant for classically represented ruins, monuments and waterfalls. The Norie family continued to provide their decorative service to Scotland's aristocracy. Robert Norie, in particular, decked out seats such as Prestonfield House, near Edinburgh, in the tradition of seventeenth century European landscape painting, with panels and canvases depicting Italianate ruins and panoramic views of unspecified places.

The circulation of Continental prints in the local market was a condition for this kind of emulation. At Moray House in Edinburgh, for instance, the Nories decorated a room with Roman scenes copied from engravings in Francois Perrier's *Icones*, available in Edinburgh from the mid century, and passed on as teaching material from St Luke's to the Trustee's Academy (Gow and Rowan, 1995). Similarly the series of panels at Kemnay House, Aberdeenshire, were an evocation of buildings and ruins found in the



seventeenth century pictures of Gaspard Dughet, rather than a reiteration of the local landscape. As with the previous century the function of such works resided in a general decorative scheme, the meaning of each individual piece finding its meaning within the larger whole (Gow, 1990).



Figure 39: *Classical Landscape with Architecture*, James Norie, 1736

But Scotland was not subject to the same impulses towards classical and generalised landscape production in the same way that England was. As with portraiture, the kinds of doctrines and strictures which formed Sir Joshua Reynold’s academy art in England never had the same kind of hold on the Scottish portrayal of landscape. At the level of patronage, the high agency of “disinterested” gentlemen - the progenitors of the classical humanist tradition as Reynolds saw it - were reduced in Edinburgh after parliament left for London. As argued in chapter three, the ability to abstract the general from the particular in England found its expression in a taste for the ideal-panoramic as opposed to the specific, realistic and “vulgar” (Dutch landscape pictures for instance). This went hand in hand with the possession of landed property, and came to depend on the capacity to exercise “disinterested” public virtue in the act of political engagement. Such engagement was less appropriate to the landed gentlemen of Scotland after 1707.



Leadership derived, instead, from the less high-falutin civil society - with impulses towards the commercial-professional and away from traditional classical humanism.

The lack of a grand landed constituency in Scotland translated into the ability of some Scottish artists to draw on less idealised and often more localised views without being castigated by Reynolds and the academy. Jacob More, for instance, was, on the one hand, known for his “civic humanist” inspired landscapes - Claudian combinations of classical ruins, monuments and placeless idylls that Reynolds praised for their handling of “air”.<sup>23</sup> More passed through the Norrie workshop as an apprentice and was involved in the activities of the city’s *literati*; he was a member and secretary of the Cape Club, for instance.<sup>24</sup> In 1771, however, More moved to Rome in search of more advanced patronage, joining other Scottish painters such as Gavin Hamilton, David Allan and Allan Ramsay, but left a fair amount of landscape work in Scotland. This varied from theatre sets for the New Theatre in Edinburgh and coats of arms on carriage doors, to the six big canvases of views around Edinburgh which More painted for the Society of Artists of London in 1771. Included in the latter are depictions of Scottish locations which adapted the neo-classical formula of Claude Vernet to Scottish scenes - “something which was both native and sophisticated” (Holloway, 1987: 7). More painted three pictures of the Falls of Clyde: Bonnington Linn, Cora Linn and Stone Byres Linn, as a place less abstract than many equivalents painted in England (although it is also true that More had to “tame” the falls in this picture so as not offend classical academic taste in the early 1770s) (Williams and Brown, 1993). Equally, Robert Norrie was known to use features from the Scottish landscape in his own idealised renderings - Ben Lawers and views of Roslin for instance.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Reynolds considered More to be “the finest painter of air since Claude” (cited in Holloway, 1987).

<sup>24</sup> A convivial society of painters, doctors, naval officers, artisans and poets, including Robert Ferguson.

<sup>25</sup> Charles Steuart’s decoration of Blair Castle from 1766 to 1778 also drew on “realistic” paintings of local, rather than imaginary scenery.



Figure 40: *The Falls of Clyde, Stonebyres Linn*, Jacob More, 1771

Part and parcel of this combination of the classical with the local were the growing aspirations of Scottish civil society itself: the articulation of a taste that, while current in civilized nations elsewhere, was sufficiently confident in local forms of production. The “Ossian issue” was a manifestation of this. In Scotland, as throughout Europe, the grand epic poems of Ossian gripped the public imagination, representing to the inhabitants of Scotland, in particular, evidence of a poet who was Homeric in his spirit, talent and virtue. Literary critics and moral philosophers (including Hugh Blair, professor at Edinburgh University) were eager to authenticate the historical truth of these potent vignettes of primitive grandeur and tragedy against a tide of doubters. The dispute held center stage in Europe for more than a generation. The fact that the poems were revealed as fakes (fabricated by James Macpherson) is interesting inasmuch as it reveals the pointed need to claim for Scotland the status of a nation that could produce such polished ancient poetry. And the effect on painting overall was quite dramatic, opening up a wealth of new subject matter on which to base landscapes, epic pictures and literary scenes. Runciman’s decorative commission of Penicuik House in 1767, for instance, included two ceilings, comprised of compositions drawn from Ossian, for the owner Sir



Figure 41: Later depiction of "Ossian's Hall", Penicuik House, decorated by Alexander Runciman, 1767

For Macmillan (1986) this cycle, in fact, embodied a kind of proto-romanticism - an evocation of the sensuous and the "real":

Ossian himself appears in the centre in the large oval singing on the seashore and playing his harp. He is surrounded by an audience, and facing him is his principal listener, Malvina, the betrothed of his dead son Oscar. In the sky behind him the clouds assume the fantastic shapes of the ghosts of the departed heroes conjured by his song...In the four corners of the ceiling around the oval appeared four gigantic river gods, the Clyde, the Tay, the Tweed and the Spey, each set in a characteristic landscape. These were massive Michaelangelesque figures. Such a dramatic use of Michelangelo is anyway exceptional at the time, but it is made even more remarkable by the way that Runciman set them in atmospheric landscapes, which in the case of the Tay and Clyde seem to have represented actual scenery (1986, 55).<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Like other aspiring artists, however, Runciman struggled against the limitations of inchoate patronage in Scotland, and sent three pictures to London to be exhibited at the Free Society (Macmillan, 1986). He eventually moved to Italy during the Penicuik commission, joining Gavin Hamilton in a grander neo-classical style of epic history pictures, only to return and



One of the most curious aspects to the whole period coined the “age of improvement” is that, on the one hand, it sees the formation of a modern commercial society in Scotland, the advent of the iron and steel industries, rapid urbanisation and the transformation of agriculture for capital accumulation. And yet, on the other hand, there were few depictions of urban or industrial townscapes in Scottish painting at this time, and little trace of the effects of the modernizing schemes or their implementation in landscape representation (Jackson, 1986).<sup>27</sup> As in most English painting, we find no vestiges of enclosure, plantation, intense farming practice, labour or the commercial exploitation of woodland in Scottish landscape painting. What was distinctive about painting, generally, in this period, was its recourse to images of the bucolic, rural and ideal as a retreat from urban commercial modernity: something even more pointed given the rapidity of modern social change in Scotland.



Figure 42: *The Highland Dance*, David Allan, 1780

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complete what came to be called “Ossian’s Hall”. Runciman also became master at the Trustees’ Academy, influencing the landscapes of pupils such as Jacob More and Alexander Nasmyth, particularly in the combination of romantic/classical tropes and local/generalized scenes.

<sup>27</sup> In this sense there were no Scottish equivalents to Joseph Wright of Derby (see note 14, chapter 3). This is even more surprising given the overlap in subject matter between Wright and someone like Jacob More, both of whom painted volcanic eruptions. Wright even painted his self-portrait for More, but this was subsequently passed to Josiah Wedgwood (Holloway, 1987).



This was as true in the landscapes of More, Runciman and Nasmyth as it was in the Scottish genre scenes of David Wilkie and David Allan, the latter a product of the Foulis Academy and master at the Trustees Academy from 1786. "Humble", romantic scenes from Highland life were popular amongst the upper and middle classes in the metropolis by the end of the eighteenth century as they had been in the Dutch republic a century earlier and in contemporary France. That Allan drew on scenes from Teniers and Ostade has been noted (Macmillan, 1986); he stopped short of the kind of social critique and realism that was current in Hogarth, however.

Far from relaying the dirt, famine and misery of ruralism or the political threat of Jacobitism, such pictures reduced the country to a set of safe customs, manners and costumes that connoted harmony and stability. Like others David Allan turned away from grand history pictures in the light of limited patronage and turned to pastoralism, illustrating scenes from Ramsay's *The Gentle Shepherd*. In this series, contemplative shepherds are shown in classical poses, playing the pipes, in front of cottages the epitome of the picturesque follies of the landed elite. The symbolic construction of the Scottish countryside, here, is not dissimilar to that outlined in Williams' description of English "romantic retrospects" in *The Country and the City* (1973). Indeed, the contrast of town and country suffused Scottish painting and writing from the latter part of the eighteenth century, reaching its apotheosis with Sir Walter Scott. This allowed the Scottish middle and upper classes to avoid the social realities of capitalism.<sup>28</sup> The emphasis on loss, on the implied corruption of the modern city and the affirmation of rural simplicity may have been a reiteration of Adam Ferguson's defence of heroic primitivism and the decline of classical virtue. The link to an orthodox formulation of civil society is therefore an interesting possibility, suggesting the permeation of ideas into genre and landscape painting. But the social efficacy of this movement should also be noted: of pastoralism as a kind of social cement. Peter Quinn explains:

This was the cosy vision of rural life which allowed a clear conscience in the social upheavals which were transforming the practice of agriculture in Scotland. Ramsay's

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<sup>28</sup> As Noble writes: "perhaps no European society was more flooded by this lachrymose tide than Scotland" (1982: 242)

work had been first published in the year after the first Leveller's Revolt and was accompanied by an obsequious dedication to Lady Buccleuch. So in 1788, on the eve of the French Revolution, David Allan was painting a picture of Scottish society in which naturally simple, lower orders acknowledge the benefits and correctness of the rule of the landed class (1990: 121).

The aestheticization of the landscape which underpinned the picturesque aesthetic fitted nicely with the ideals of the improving landowners keen on "pleasing prospects" and the controlled disposition of nature.<sup>29</sup> Patently, landowners did not like to think of themselves as destroyers of rural traditions or transformers of the landscape (Williams, 1973). On the contrary, they needed to present themselves as upstanding and loyal pillars of the rural community. In landscape painting, the effacement of what Barrell (1980) has called the "dark side of the landscape" - farm labour, social unrest, eviction, modern commercial farming techniques, communication lines, and so on - coincided directly with the industrialisation of the countryside in the late eighteenth century. But it also coincided with the "beautification" of the landscape in the tradition of house building and landscape gardening, where the ideology of enlightenment (of the improving landlords) translated as the arrangement and alteration of nature - to hide, present and alter.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> William Gilpin, an influential champion of the picturesque, expressed the general distaste for working landscapes in 1792, "In a moral view the industrious mechanic is a more pleasing object than the loitering peasant...in a picturesque light it is otherwise. The arts of industry are rejected; even idleness...adds dignity to a character. Thus the lazy cowherd resting on his pole, or the peasant lolling on a rock may be allowed in the grandest scene" (quoted in Jackson, 1986: 23).

<sup>30</sup> The picturesque was dominant in Britain from the 1770s to the 1820s, and became the ordering movement in tourism, guide books and landscape culture generally. As articulated in the work of Uvedale Price and Richard Payne Knight the picturesque signalled a shift away from the smooth, ordered and flawless landscapes of the mid eighteenth century, towards the rugged, varied and overgrown. Country house owners, with an eye on metropolitan fashions, wanted overgrown, dilapidated and irregular gardens, made to look old and to fit snugly and timelessly into the landscape. The landscape, here, is aestheticized, made to look "natural" - idealizing a nature that was in fact rapidly vanishing. The picturesque used modern aesthetic effects to hide modernization. Roads were hidden, communications concealed and mills put out of sight. Landscape gardeners like Capability Brown and Humphry Repton were hired to shape the land in keeping with dominant tastes and the interests of the improving aristocracy, just as Gainsborough was commissioned to promote landowners as an essential part of English ruralism. By the early nineteenth century this aestheticization was complete with Constable's pastoral landscapes (Bermingham, 1986). In Scotland Relugas House, Perthshire, became a notable example of the picturesque movement. At the hand of George Cumming and Sir Thomas Dick

In the late eighteenth century, the Scottish landscapist Alexander Nasmyth, named the “founder of the Landscape Painting School of Scotland” by David Wilkie (quoted in Cooksey, 1979: 3), was employed for a variety of such “improving” schemes. As well as working within and developing the decorative tradition, Nasmyth was commissioned to paint landscape schemes that outlined a prospect after a proposed modification - a temple, neo-classical bridge or cleared line of vision. In 1801, for instance, he illustrated the effect of a planned lighthouse on the estate of the Duke of Argyll. He designed gardens, pleasure grounds, well-heads and other architectural features for the Grand Tour-educated landed elite; and he worked for the Duke of Buccleuch at Dalkeith Palace where he painted two views of the Esk in Dalkeith Park. For the most part it was Claude and Poussin’s epic, neo-classical renderings of nature that provided the ideal set of visual references in this context. These offered panoramic abstractions, classical falls, foliage and distant views which signified a “correct” taste for the enlightened landed elite. Nasmyth was asked to formulate landscape work in the tradition of the picturesque - the inclusion of variety in the visual scheme-adjusting the rural environment to cater to the ideologies of Scotland’s enlightened landowners.<sup>31</sup>

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Lauder the Relugas estate was subject to carefully-contrived improvements by the early nineteenth century, melding the landscape with buildings, bridges and trees. As Sir Thomas Dick Lauder wrote, “Nature, should be permitted wildly to luxuriate everywhere throughout the extended grounds, those more immediately connected with the house should be formed by Nature which has yielded herself somewhat to the rules of art, so as to be in harmony with the formality of architecture...” (quoted in Rock, 1995: 269).

<sup>31</sup> The instigation of tree planting in this context at the behest of the capitalist landowner has interesting resonances. As Womack has noted, trees were an important symbolic index of ownership and protection for the Scottish landowner. The Duke of Atholl’s large-scale plantation of the larch in the Highlands in the late eighteenth century, for example, was praised by Robert Burns as a form of enlightened paternalism. But it was also “the cultivated landlord’s visible signature on the land, the means by which he at once acknowledges, enhances and appropriates - in a word, improves - its virtue” (1989: 67)

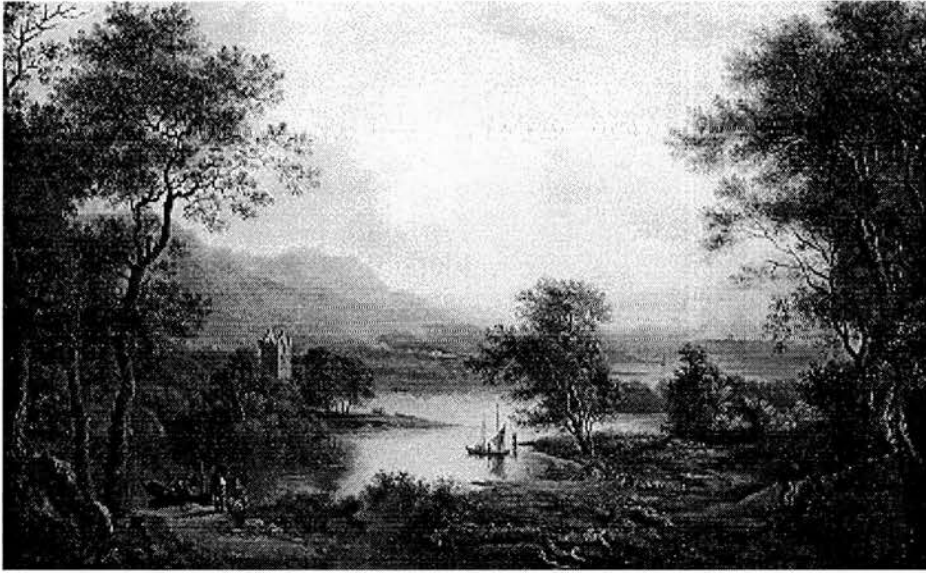


Figure 43: *Highland Loch Scene with Castle*, Alexander Nasmyth, 1790s

That the Highlands had to be “softened” in these scenes is evidence, still, of the residues of a taste current from earlier in the century that dismissed the mountainous, particular and barren (Williams and Brown, 1993). Landowners required foliage in their commissioned pieces in order to render themselves visible as progenitors of taste and protectors of the land. Most of Alexander Nasmyth’s work emphasized and reproduced this landed aesthetic.

At the same time, however, there is a sense in which he extended this movement in order to respond to other tendencies that began to run through the art field in Scotland by the end of the century. Unlike Reynolds and his valorization of Claude, Nasmyth was more and more inclined to include specific and local idiosyncrasies into his landscapes - changes in the light, rugged mountains, an evocation of personal mood or the inclusion of recognisable buildings, like Edinburgh Castle, rather than classical ruins. Indeed, as Macmillan (1986) indicates Nasmyth never painted imaginary buildings in his landscapes; he always depicted “real” places - something which would have been rare half a century earlier. The constant inclusion of human figures drawn from life (rather than allegorical or mythological figures that transcended the limits of ordinary humanity) further suggests a more modern approach to the environment and sociality, and by the 1820s Nasmyth had turned towards the urban spectacle and the building of the New Town as subject matter.





Figure 44: *Edinburgh From the Calton Hill*, Alexander Nasmyth, 1825

This duality of the local and the general, the rural and the urban, or the ideal and the particular in Nasmyth can be linked to the complex forces and discourses which characterised the art world by the turn of the century. He was commissioned by both the landed aristocracy and the emerging commercial bourgeoisie.<sup>32</sup> He depicted classical ruins but also favoured Gothic. He was fascinated with science and enlightenment (his involvement in Edinburgh's literary clubs, in scientific innovations such as the paddle-steamer, and his apprenticeship to Allan Ramsay is well known), but also lived on into the reign of Queen Victoria and the fancies of Sir Walter Scott. He was beginning to assert himself as an "autonomous" artist with the establishment of the city's Society of Scottish Artists in 1808, and the increasingly professionalised Trustees Academy, and yet also remained servile to the directives of various patrons with their symbolic needs. His work was first seeing the light of day, and purchased, in a public market with the rise of exhibitions early in the next century, but also remained under the private aristocratic

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<sup>32</sup> One such businessman was Patrick Miller, a man of the enlightenment and Edinburgh banker who gave Nasmyth £500 to enable him to go to Rome in 1782. Nasmyth returned to Scotland in 1785.

gaze. He painted the picturesque Lowlands but was also interested in the Highlands and was a good friend of Robert Burns. Finally, like Burns, Nasmyth was chastised for his nationalist sympathies; indeed, according to Macmillan (1986) this was the reason for his abandonment of portraiture (Raeburn's virtual monopoly of the portrait market may be of more relevance) but he also stood on the threshold of Romanticism and the bowdlerisation, popularisation and sentimentalisation of Jacobitism (Pittock, 1991).<sup>33</sup> It is testament to the potential complexity and growing autonomy of Edinburgh's art world that such multiple tendencies - a growing cultural mix of patrons and styles within a middle range - were possible.

*iv) The Function of Criticism: the Critic as Arbiter of Taste*

Finally, the shape of the cultural field was modified in relation to the function of criticism. It has been noted that writers during the Scottish Enlightenment enjoyed the ideational freedom that accompanied the rise of moderatism, a larger reading public and spaces for literary expression. It was also indicated in chapter two how modern critics and writers such as Kant were essential to the overall morphology of "autonomous" art fields as they began to develop in Europe from the mid-eighteenth century. As Williams notes in his *Keywords*, from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries criticism developed as an orientation in literature towards taste, cultivation and discrimination and embodied a sense of "judgement as the predominant and even natural response" (1976: 75). The role of the critic, therefore, was bound up with the articulation of standards of judgment - which, in turn, depended on the "the social confidence of a class and later a profession" (ibid.). As the body of ideas treating of "taste", "beauty" and "art", aesthetics became a

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<sup>33</sup> Given all these tensions and urgencies it is of little surprise to note that, by the next century, Nasmyth's pictures were becoming less and less favoured amongst a rapidly changing art public. When, in 1821, he engraved a series of vignettes to illustrate Sir Walter Scott's Waverley novels, Scott thought them too "tame": they were neither rugged, specific nor "realistic" enough. Instead, Scott asked for the services of Joseph Turner. Nasmyth tried to "loosen up" his technique - to rely less on the old masters and to "romanticise" his work, to tap into the emerging popularity of the sublime and detailed - but could never pull this off satisfactorily. He remained an artist on the cusp, embodying the last gasps of the picturesque but also trying to find his way in a newer, wilder, more romanticised vision which stressed the detailed, idiosyncratic and subjective.

crucial movement in the shift away from antiquated relations of patronage and pointed towards the construction of a modern object - the work of art. It helped to express the very ideology of art as a distinct entity to be apprehended in and for itself, to be addressed as a specialised regime of value and practice. All of which presupposed a new kind of human subject whose orientation to the world - disinterested, sensitive and delicate - would do most to discriminate between the “tasteful” and “vulgar” within the universe of cultural objects. Aesthetics would begin, therefore, to ask questions not merely of the rules of beauty in the construction of art works but on aesthetic experience from the position of the viewer, the person experiencing beauty, the critic. The concept of taste was crucial to this endeavour because it signified the existence of an “inner sense” that in its pure form, and possessed by the right type of critic, could recognise the transcendental value of certain objects.

The very existence of critics and a body of aesthetic thought, then, was an index of developing art worlds, and in Edinburgh the appearance of “treatises”, “enquiries” and “essays” on relevant artistic subjects adds to the feeling that this was a cultural field undergoing significant growth. Indeed the convergence between the output of some of Edinburgh’s writers and those on the continent seems to express a kind of “catching up”, and, perhaps, overtaking in intellectual output enjoyed in Scotland’s capital. But who writes and why? Well, as we might expect the key writers in aesthetics were also those of the Enlightenment in general. The period under study shows the likes of Lord Kames, Francis Hutcheson, David Hume and Thomas Reid all writing substantial pieces on questions of “taste”, “beauty” and perception.

Francis Hutcheson’s *Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, and *Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections*, both of the 1720s, were probably the first tracts in Scotland to deal with aspects of taste and the idea of an “inner sense”. His influence on aesthetics and moral philosophy as a whole in Scotland is considerable (Wilkinson, 1992; Daiches, 1986; Rendall, 1978). The Glasgow-based Hutcheson posited, as Shaftesbury had done, a relationship between a “natural” sense of moral good and that of “the dignity of enjoyment from fine poetry, painting, or from knowledge”. Such a sense, he argued, was distinct from “the pleasures of the palate”

(quoted in Rendall, 1978: 81-82), as it was in the Kantian antipathy towards primal, bodily pleasures. The power to perceive ideas and works of beauty, which Hutcheson called “fine genius or taste” (ibid.), implied a displacement of the more “objective” criteria stipulated in the composed sets of directions for the standard rules of beauty. “Internal sense”, instead, was a by-word for taste which lived in the potentially subjective realm of perception. Hutcheson wrote of beauty as “the idea raised in us” and in doing so stressed the faculties of perceptual appreciation that the “internal sense” was able to capture. This, of course, created new problems of consistency in the construction of a system of universal standards that Enlightenment thinkers all over Europe still desired: the enduring notion that the classics appealed to all ages, for instance. How, in other words, could the emphasis on the mechanics of individual perception be squared with the idea of a “correct taste” that transcended subjectivity? This was the question that reached to the heart of the aesthetic problematic as it unfolded in the eighteenth century; Scotland was no exception.

Thomas Reid, the “common-sense” philosopher, professional cleric and critic of Hume’s scepticism, was another Glasgow-based figure who dwelt on matters aesthetic. Reid was elected Chair of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow University in 1764 and wrote *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (1785), *Essays on the Active Powers of Man* (1788), an *Inquiry into the Human Mind* and *Lectures on Fine Arts*. All of these posed questions on perception and beauty in a manner reminiscent of Hutcheson. While never abandoning the thesis that beauty resides in the objective matter of certain objects, Reid traced the production of an aesthetic response in the mind of the perceiver. As Nauckhoff (1994) points out, beauty appeared as objective in Reid’s analyses to the extent that it expressed some mental excellence, some “original principle” of human nature; objects are beautiful, in other words, when they come to express certain perfections of the mind. So, a painting is beautiful, for Reid, when it represents “the passions and dispositions of men in the attitudes and countenances” (quoted in Nauckhoff, 1994: 187). Paintings which depict a relaxed and languid repose derive their beauty from signification of natural signs of ease, which, themselves express a kind of passion of human sentiment. “We do not” writes Nauckhoff, summarising Reid, “attribute beauty to the painting on the basis of



how it makes *us* feel; neither do we look behind it to the artist's frame of mind. Rather, it is the passion itself, which we attend to: we apprehend ease itself, through its natural signs. Beauty, then, resides 'in' the painting in the sense that the painting represents signs which in turn express perfections of the mind" (ibid., 187). Aesthetic pleasure was not, here, a matter of corporeal sense as in the literal meaning of "taste" but resided, for Reid, in a lasting disposition or quality of perception that indicated an "internal sense". As already indicated, it was this formulation that informed Raeburn's painterly excursions into the role of perception and his rejection of the abstract and ideal.

The very presence of thinkers such as Reid, who wrote and published on questions which had a bearing on artistic practice, could not fail to energise the local artistic field as a whole. And by raising modern questions on the status of the artistic object, on the issue of the particularity of taste, and on the role of the observer, the critic moved increasingly into the seat of judgment. Edinburgh was beginning to witness an explosion in criticism the likes of which it had never seen. Figures like Lord Kames, James Beattie, Alexander Gerard, Allan Ramsay, Hugh Blair and Archibald Alison, the latter a mutual friend of Raeburn's, wrote various amounts on aspects of taste, mostly in relation to moral philosophy. This all helped to define the space of the critic in relation both to the modern public and the universe of propriety by the second half of the eighteenth century. Indeed the "public" dimension to writing had taken on an air of "socialized dependence" as writers sought public legitimation for their efforts in civil society. Hume, for instance, was constantly gauging the success of his books in Edinburgh and mulling over the "public's" reaction to his *Treatise on Human Nature*. For greater responsiveness to the world of opinion connected with the display of taste that was important to this class of critics: the desire to express discrimination in literature as well as manners, furniture as well as poetry, art as well as food. Hence, the public world of debate and reception which took off by the mid eighteenth century, delivered to aesthetic criticism a role that began to meld it to the cultural field as a whole. While in no way did criticism in eighteenth century Edinburgh exhibit the normative power of its modern nineteenth century counterpart, critics did at least begin to contribute to the symbolic value of certain cultural forms and products, consecrating works which fitted

with the ideals of a classical education in particular. Moreover, critics began to occupy a space within the field that was structurally and functionally homologous with the audience for which they wrote.

Lord Kames, for instance, a figure already mentioned in relation to the Board of Trustees and agricultural modernisation, turned his critical acumen to aspects of classical literature and aesthetics, and in doing so pitted the insights of the critic against the vulgar, ignorant and “deformed”.<sup>34</sup> *Elements of Criticism* was published in 1762, to Voltaire’s rather critical reception, and placed Kames within the intellectual field of the European *literati*. His theoretical interventions into aesthetics and literary criticism, however, also marked the impulse to refinement, polished manners and cultural civility that, in his own view, was beginning to strengthen in Scotland:

It is an admirable sign of the progress of the human spirit that we should have coming from Scotland today rules of taste in all the arts, from the epic poem to gardening. L’esprit humain is extending itself every day, and we need not despair of very soon receiving treatises on poetics and rhetoric from the Orkney Islands (quoted in Lehmann, 1971: 44-5).

The role of the “rational science of criticism”, here, was itself to cultivate “to a high degree of refinement...the heart no less than the understanding” (ibid: 222-23). And, for Kames, the basis to all aspects of taste was a naturally derived human capacity which could be studied empirically and through the faculties of reason. Hence, the uncertainties that various other writers encountered in the establishment of taste was by-passed in Kames’ view to the extent that a valid and universally acknowledged standard of taste with independent ontological status was posited. In literature this was expressed in the valorisation of the classics - Cicero, Virgil, Homer, as well as Shakespeare, Addison, Butler and Macpherson’s Ossian. Kames concentrated on rhetoric and literature more

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<sup>34</sup> Kames was born in 1696 into a wealthy Berwickshire landowning family. He became Lord of Justiciary in 1763, and maintained close companionship with David Hume. His contributions to legal theory, to the various clubs and societies in Edinburgh and to “national improvement” in general, has been noted by Lehmann, among others. As this biographer notes: “He was long considered one of the country’s two or three leading ‘arbiters of taste’ in matters literary and, through his critical counsels to aspiring and accomplished authors and through other efforts, he became one of its principal promoters of letters” (1971: xvii).

than on painting or music and over half of *Elements of Criticism* comprised a psychological analysis of various human sentiments and passions embodied in the classical tenets of literature.<sup>35</sup> The confidence with which the potential variations of taste and quality are reduced to a single standard of taste is testament to the belief in the “natural” superiority of Kames’ aristocratic ties (as compared to the less certain position of some of the more “bourgeois” critics, for instance). If great literature was transcendental, if it passed the test of time, it was only critics possessed of the knowledge, leisure time and taste that were able to reveal this transcendence. Kames was unequivocal in this. Only those with refined sensibilities and a classical education would fit the bill. We should not, he exclaimed, refer to everyone’s opinion equally. The “greater part of mankind”, those who rely for their livelihoods on “bodily labour” should be excluded because they lack any kind of taste so far as “fine arts is concerned” (quoted in Berry, 1997: 178).

Like elsewhere, therefore, the critic as arbiter of taste in Edinburgh worked with the logic of distinction and distancing that began to take shape in the realm of civil society. The critic established standards of taste that marked the ability of this class to “play the game” of criticism and aesthetic appreciation (Bourdieu, 1993). Taste in the arts allowed the aristocracy and *litterati* to mark their membership of this “polished” or “civilized” urban public. On the one hand, “high culture”, in its nascent form, was identified with (and appropriated by) the block of cultural and intellectual leaders that emerged in Edinburgh from the middle to late eighteenth century. On the other hand, part of the definition of a refined culture, and of civil society as a whole, was the construction of its opposite - the vulgar, deformed, bodily and ignorant. It was Edinburgh’s enlightenment precepts, for instance, that underpinned the gradual institutionalisation of the mad, the sad and the bad in purpose-built spaces such as asylums, prisons, clinics and asylums (Markus, 1993); and a codification of the lower “other” was reiterated in the emerging spaces of the public sphere. The very definition of “civil society” written for the

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<sup>35</sup> The book was received well in Edinburgh and was lauded for its “very extensive erudition, the many nice and accurate criticisms interspersed throughout, [showing] with what close attention and refined taste he has perused the most admirable authors, both ancient and modern” (*Scottish Literary Review*, quoted in Lehmann, 1971: 228).

Edinburgh-based *Encyclopedia Britannica* of 1771 is sufficient to make the point:

The welfare, nay, the nature of civil society, requires that there should be a subordination of orders or diversity of ranks and conditions in it; - that certain men, or orders of men, be appointed to superintend and manage such affairs as concerns the public and happiness...The superiority of the higher orders, or the authority with which the state has invested them, entitle them, especially if they employ their authority well, to *the obedience and submission of the lower*, and to a proportionate honour and respect from all. *The subordination of the lower ranks claims protection, defence, and security from the higher*...Public spirit, heroic zeal, love of liberty, and the other political duties, do, above all others, recommend those who practise them to the admiration and homage of mankind; because, as they are the offspring of the noblest minds, so they are the parents of the greatest blessings to society (1771, vol. iii. 295, my emphasis)

All of which brings us to why Hume's problematic in the essay "On the Standard of Taste" is such a powerful expression of the project of the *literati* to attain social and cultural leadership in the second half of the eighteenth century. While it may be inappropriate to disengage Hume from the British context as a whole (his philosophical conversations with Shaftesbury, Addison and Locke are of course formative) it should be recognised that Hume's writings had an effect on the local field in Edinburgh. His writings were published in the capital and his presence in the city was a constant stimulus to other writers and practitioners - Allan Ramsay fitting both categories here. Further, his connections with continental thought when transposed to Edinburgh's civic landscape can not have failed to ignite the sparks of ideational complexity that aesthetics were beginning to show in the capital. So while Kant writes of Hume's influence as follows: "it was David Hume's remark that...interrupted my dogmatic slumber and gave a completely different direction to my enquiries in the field of speculative philosophy" (quoted in Wilkinson, 1992: 236), the effect of these same writings on the more local environment should not go unnoted.

Criticism was a subject identified in Hume's preface to the *Treatise on Human Nature* that the "science of man" would raise to the heights of excellence. Like many other established writers of the Enlightenment - Montesquieu, Voltaire and Kant in particular - Hume was concerned to reveal certain principles of criticism and their relationship to standards of taste. Hume's social circle included many of the Scottish writers mentioned above whose civic impulse to socialise, discuss and improve always



retained the idea of a natural public of common professionals, men of letters and taste. To this extent a community of cultural association promoted the idea of the critic as a natural leader in matters of taste; but a critic who was representative of a consensus view. The importance of such an agreement can also be seen in the thought of Enlightenment figures such as Hutcheson and Smith (the “impartial spectator”), and Kant himself (the *sensus communis*).<sup>36</sup> In Hume’s aesthetics, the will-to-consensus was a deeply rooted desire to establish a constituency of spokesmen who would represent the disinterested ideal of taste. Just as art struggled to be set apart from skill or abundance and took on the qualities of a sensibility in Scotland, so virtue linked in with a taste for the beautiful, civil and refined: that which marked the character of the gentleman and philosopher.

Questions of taste, beauty and aesthetics are posed in many of Hume’s writings of the 1740s and 50s. The publication of *Essays, Moral and Political* in 1741, with new essays added throughout this decade, displayed a heavily aesthetic agenda within the context of moral philosophy. By 1758 the study had been re-named *Essays, Moral, Political and Literary* and included Hume’s key account “Of the Standard of Taste”. This essay added to the comments already made in essays such as: “Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion”, “Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences”, and “Of Refinement in the Arts”. “Arts” in this context still bore the relatively undifferentiated status of human skill and the humanities, but there are enough comments in these essays alluding to a developing sphere of “high culture” to warrant critical attention. This is particularly apparent in Hume’s comments on taste (in the later essays, for instance) where the “polite” and “finer” arts, are placed alongside ideas of “genius”, and a “true standard of taste” (Hume does write about “pictures” but not in much detail; his examples tend to be drawn from poetry and literature).

Despite the age-old recognition that artistic judgments varied - *de gustibus non disputandum est* - this maxim was made obsolete in the movement towards a “natural” standard of taste, a rule by which the various sentiments of men may be harmonised. Put

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<sup>36</sup> The role of the “impartial spectator” for Smith is “to prevent those contradictions and arrive at a more stable judgment of things, we fix on some steady and general point of view, and always in our thoughts, place ourselves in them, whatever may be our general situation” (quoted in Becker, 1994: 56).

another way, the potential subjectivity that was raised in the acceptance of a perceptual dimension to the reception of beauty, was immediately put down in favour of “real matters of fact” that signified an enduring standard. For Hume, underpinning critical acumen were certain possessions, of which he mentions five: “strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison and cleared of all prejudice” (1779: 241). When individuals who have these characteristics agree upon aesthetic judgments, that agreement “is the standard of taste and beauty”. Tautologically posed: good art was what critics agreed upon and a critic with taste was one who defined good art. To achieve the required sentiment towards works of art, Hume, like those before him, invoked the “inner sense” (“strong sense” as it is termed in Hume’s five dispositions) possessed by some men with “delicacy of taste” to appreciate the subtleties of beauty and the deformities of lesser works:

There is a *delicacy* of *taste* observable in some men, which very much resembles this *delicacy* of *passion*, and produces the same sensibility to beauty and deformity of every kind, as that does to prosperity and adversity, obligations and injuries. When you present a poem or a picture to a man possessed of this talent, the delicacy of his feeling makes him be sensibly touched with every part of it; nor are the masterly strokes perceived with more exquisite relish and satisfaction, than the negligences or absurdities with disgust and uneasiness (1776: 4).

Hume’s aim, in a nutshell, was to find a logical link between the existence of a “correct taste” which underwrote the timeless appeal of the classics, with this theory of an “inner sense”. For the latter theory did not sit well with static “rules of art”, with the idea of a “durable admiration, which attends those works, that have survived all the caprices of mode and fashion, all the mistakes of ignorance and envy” (1776: 233). The dilemma seemed to be compounded by the apparent lack of agreement amongst Hume’s fellow critics as to what qualities aesthetic objects must have to make them tasteful. For Addison it was the sublime, novelty and beauty; for Shaftesbury it was harmony and proportion; for Hutcheson it was “uniformity amidst variety”; and for Kames it was objective classical beauty. Hume tried to reconcile and unite these potential differences by putting his trust in a constant feature of human nature, cast in terms of the “inner sense”, but which on occasions was subject to interference from other factors (which

remain ill-defined in the essay).<sup>37</sup> In the last analysis, however, it was still the ideal community of critics who retained the power to judge, because, in Hume's view, a true judge can never be wrong.<sup>38</sup> The joint verdict of such critics, arrived at through acts of reason and discussion so carefully represented in Allan's picture *The Connoisseurs*, determined the "true standard of taste and beauty" (1776: 241). Indeed by the end of the essay Hume was much more confident in this assertion, as he was in the existence of "correct" and "incorrect" tastes:

Though men of delicate taste be rare, they are easily to be distinguished in society, by the soundness of their understanding and the superiority of their faculties above the rest of mankind...The general principles of taste are uniform in human nature: Where men vary in their judgments, some defect or perversion in the faculties may commonly be remarked; proceeding either from prejudice, from want of practice, or want of delicacy; and there is just reason for approving one taste, and condemning another (1776: 243).

Now, many commentators have mused on the internal coherence to Hume's argument in "Of the Standard of Taste" (for recent attempts see Shiner, 1996; Perricone, 1995; Noel, 1994; Gracyk, 1994; Shelley, 1994) in relation to the oscillation between the "objectivity thesis" (that there are definite rules and standards of artistic taste *a la* classicism) and the "subjectivity thesis" (that beauty must also reside in what the perceiver brings to the encounter with art - Hume calls this "understanding"). What these accounts fail to mention, however, are the social and ideological factors (rather than epistemological/philosophical questions) which made it a priority for Hume to retain both the objective and subjective in relation to questions of judgment. Clearly, if one belongs to a newly emerging cultural and intellectual elite whose distinction rests with a propensity in matters of civility and high culture, then one would need to retain a role in

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<sup>37</sup> Wilkinson, for instance, manages to summarise Hume's position as follows: "Since there is an invariant structure of inner sense, the only way to explain instances of divergent aesthetic judgment is to suppose that the operations of the inner sense have been disrupted by other factors. (If on a given occasion you judge Virgil to be dull, the fault is in you, not Virgil" (1992: 237). Still, Wilkinson is as vague as Hume as to what these disruptions might be.

<sup>38</sup> To this extent Hume's "double standard of taste" - that of the rules of art and that of the joint verdict of critics - cannot conflict given the true judge's perfection. Or as Shelley puts it: "correctly formulated rules of art turn out simply to be the rules according to which the critical faculty of a true judge operates" (1994, 441).

civil society for such a community. But what role is there in matters of taste if either a) the rules of art and beauty yield so easily to mere reason; that aesthetics was no different to any other scientific undertaking or b) questions of judgment were relative and phenomenological; that aesthetics was a matter of “anything goes”. Hume plumps for a middle ground between these two positions (often drawing in aspects of both) precisely because the critics he has in mind would be cognate, pro-active and “delicate in taste” and yet would also discover or gravitate to a certain regularity in matters of beauty, the laws of which exist outside of him. Hume, in other words, projects his own social position into the solution to the problem of aesthetics by affirming, in the last analysis, the natural foundational uniformity of his class.

Introducing the question of the sociological within the aesthetic this way reveals the project of all the critics mentioned to have a socio-genesis and function within an inchoate bourgeois public sphere. The will-to-consensus, to judgment, to distinction and to distancing arose both from the *literati's* position within the field, and, homologously, from their own social backgrounds. The ideal connoisseur in each case was someone with education, leisure and wealth: in short, a member of the aristocratic and professional classes.<sup>39</sup> Like Kant, Hume stressed the critical prerequisite of “disinterestedness”: he essentialised the ideal of a “mind free from all prejudice”, which contemplated nothing but the work of art itself - “the very object which is submitted to his examination” (1776: 239). Clearly, this faculty was a product of the educated *habitus*, of the socio-economically privileged, whose distance from labour and whose level of exposure to the requisite cultural works (mostly the classics, especially in Edinburgh) predisposed them to speak of certain standards, taste preferences and orientations towards the pure object.

While the likes of Hutcheson, Reid, Kames and Hume appeared to acknowledge

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<sup>39</sup> Indeed that Hume privileges the professional middle class is apparent in his essay “Of the Middle Station of Life”. This social position is conducive to virtue, ambition and happiness, according to Hume, fostering advancements in learning and the arts. In this it is distinguished both from the miseries of the low, who are “too much occupy’d in providing for the Necessities of Life, to hearken to the calm Voice of Reason” (1776: 546), and from the excesses of the “great” - “There are more natural Parts, and a stronger Genius requisite to make a good Lawyer or Physician, than to make a great Monarch”, (1776:548).



the role of society and culture in promoting the proper exercise of taste - one half of the Enlightenment project of education, democratisation and improvement - they simultaneously disavowed this role by constantly referring to “universal and natural standards”; to “general principles of taste...uniform in human nature” (1776: 249); and to a commonality of human cognition free from all social difference and influence. Hume writes in “Delicacy of Taste”, for instance: “we are pretty much masters what books we shall read, what diversions we shall partake of, and what company we shall keep” (1776: 5). If taste is in some sense socio-historically detached, then society’s prevalent aesthetic judgments attain the status of natural or ontological givens rather than provisional and contingent products of history. In order to by-pass the problem of aesthetics all that Hume needed, as Shusterman notes, was an “intersubjectively shared” objective standard: “His deep purpose, a purpose he himself did not fully fathom, was social stability under the aegis of the increasingly ascendant bourgeoisie and its liberal ideology” (Shusterman, 1993: 102).

Like other critics of the eighteenth century, Hume’s community of taste was one separate from the feudal order of absolutism, of the judgments of single tyrannical leaders; but also one in contradistinction to the vulgar pleasures of lower constituencies. In Hume this took the form of a rejection of “prejudice”, “interest”, “labour” and “barbarism”; in Kames it was the “exclusion of classes so many and numerous [which] reduces within a narrow compass those who are qualified to be judges in the fine arts” (quoted in Shusterman, 1993: 107). In the work of others it was, (as mentioned in chapter three) denial of the particular. The idea that the useful, mechanical, bodily and detailed should be excluded from the aesthetic process found philosophical support in Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). As in Reynolds and Hume, Smith’s ethics reinforced a consensual mode of perception, securing solidarity among members of the new elite. What defined the “impartial spectator” here, though, was the suppression of the “other”- bodily appetites, for instance, which were considered antithetical to proper citizenship and judgment. Indeed, the exclusion of women from this public universe of taste, criticism and citizenship may well have been bound up with the denial of the

particular (Bohls, 1993).<sup>40</sup>

So while taste is considered to be pure when devoid of “fever”, “disease” or other aberrational interferences, giving it a natural quality, it is clear that the “true judge” is not some primal savage or innocent but a highly educated and trained (male) individual with an abundance of cultural capital. “For what is the requisite practice, comparison, and good sense of Hume’s critic”, asks Shusterman, “except for the achievement and exercise of dispositions (socially acquired and refined) to react to the right objects in the culturally right way or to think in ways that society regards as reasonable?” (1993: 105). And although the de-particularized framework of contemplation did not catch on in Edinburgh as much as it did in London due to the lack of a central Royal academy like Reynolds’, and of the greater aristocracy to support such a view, elements of such a powerful ideology did permeate into the institutions and discourses of enlightened Edinburgh - in landscape painting as well as criticism, for instance.

#### v) *Conclusion*

What criticism did in the capital, in sum, was take up a space within the public sphere; it articulated a new system of aesthetics and helped to erase an older, patronal system. The critic helped to provide the ideational catalyst for a more modern system of fine art in Edinburgh, by consecrating the idea of art as an object in itself. Hume, Kames, Hutcheson and Reid all, therefore, played their part in stimulating the theory and practice of art. For the first time in Edinburgh, treatises and essays constituted a new object in discourse - the monadic art object, relatively autonomous from previous rules of beauty

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<sup>40</sup> Bohls links the set of ideas informing the civic humanist ideal of the male citizen who abstractly contemplates the aesthetic object *a la* Reynolds with a corollary movement to suppress sense gratification, private interest and the feminine. The ideational connections made between women and bodily or material nature is particularly apt here. As she writes: “The disinterested aesthetic attitude, the de-particularized artwork or picturesque view, and the impartial spectator all work to universalise modes of perception made possible only by material privilege - to assume or render them generally shared. Feminist criticism repeatedly reminds us that such moves exclude not only women but any group at a distance from the privileged center of such perception” (1993: 43).

and religious directives.<sup>41</sup> Criticism also expressed the priorities of an increasingly confident middle class, backed by an aristocracy, whose aim it was to distinguish itself as a block of natural leaders, from above and below. If Enlightenment and civil society meant opening up, it also meant closing down; its dynamic was both democratic and elitist; its public was modern but exclusive; its priorities were not merely to educate and refine but to distanciate and distinguish. This brought it into line with cultural trends elsewhere in Europe, marking a break with previous discourses of judgment and contributing to the rise of bourgeois aesthetics in mid eighteenth-century Europe as a whole.

The question remains, of course, to what extent *thought* outweighed, or became a substitute for *action* in Edinburgh. Writing about art and aesthetics is different to actually practicing art and it is clear that the volume and reputation of Scotland's painters came nowhere near that of critics. Apart from Raeburn and Ramsay, Scotland's "golden age" did not produce equivalents of Hume, Ferguson, Smith, Black, Hutton and Cullen. Perhaps writing and the intellectual sphere did not suffer as much as the visual arts from years of accumulated poverty, cultural uncertainty and political instability. It is true that Scotland's visual output was subject to detrimental forces that appeared not to impact so heavily on other forms - architecture is another example. In defence of painting, however, in addition to the tangible contacts between certain theorists and painters (Hume and Ramsay, Reid and Raeburn), the fact is writers, intellectuals and painters were discursively connected in that they shared the emerging space of civil society and the public sphere. Advances in one aspect of this space always rubbed off on other aspects, particularly in a relatively small urban unit like Edinburgh. Ultimately, all

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<sup>41</sup> Although Alexander Gerard's contribution to the field has not been mentioned in detail, it is worth considering the essays of this Aberdeen university professor in relation to questions of creativity and the modern notion of genius. Gerard's essays included an "Essay on Genius" (1774), and an "Essay on Taste" (first edition, 1759; 3rd edition, 1780). The latter won the Edinburgh (previously Select) Society's gold medal prize for an essay on the subject of taste. Again, after acknowledging that there might be some variety in taste, Gerard moves to disavow this variety by upholding a "natural" standard that sound judgment (and respectable critics) will always gravitate to (see Berry, 1997). The essay on genius, is itself notable for connecting this modern aesthetic concept to the ability to "invent" by "assembling ideas" in the "imagination" (an equation not too far removed from Romanticism).

members of civil society and the public sphere were responsible for a certain complexification and differentiation within the cultural field as a whole. Merely by talking of “art” in the spaces of literature, the coffee houses and taverns was enough to direct attention to the status of an object that had previously been taken for granted.

The differentiated art object did not spring fully-formed from the pens of critics, but developed slowly in an accumulated process of attention and practice. That Edinburgh did not possess public art galleries or major spaces for exhibition at the end of the eighteenth century can be attributed to the forces that for centuries kept the field in check - poverty, instability and the lack of centralised forms of patronage. In Bourdieu’s terms (1993), furthermore, the dynamic struggle between a modern and an ancient faction within the ruling class (between the extremes of a professional middle class striving for autonomy and a nobility/aristocracy positioned at the pole of heteronomy/commerce) was nascent, not yet delivering the vital impetus towards progression that Romanticism was later to bring. The *litterati*, in this sense, was still the dominant (rather than dominated) faction of the dominant class. In the shift away from the guilds, the rise of the market and collections, the increasing popularity of landscape painting and portraiture, as well as the development of aesthetics, however, the vital organs of a modern art body were assembling in Edinburgh. The agency of such a transition in Edinburgh, united for the moment, was that block of *litterati* and aristocracy that desired to render itself visually present, to itself and others, in acts of distinction - not grand or heroic, but civic and tasteful. In this, Scotland’s idiosyncratic position in Europe was its already de-centralised cultural system and fertile civil society. At once, this made for an ambiguous cultural field: lacking the official forms of power and patronage to take issue with, and yet enjoying an advanced institutional and discursive cultural system. Into the heart of the fine arts was such a double-edged process etched; into the very pictures were the nuances of socio-cultural change coded; and into the morphology of the city were such ambiguities and double-codes made spatially visible.



## **A SOCIO-GENESIS OF THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF SCOTLAND AND EDINBURGH'S ART FIELD, 1800-1859**

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### **A: Introduction**

In the pursuance of their own interests, several key institutions struggle over the stakes of the art field in the early nineteenth century. The outcome of these struggles is the foundation of the National Gallery of Scotland in 1851. It will be my objective to unravel the specific conflicts at work within the artistic field and point to the elementary economic, cultural and social conditions which underpinned the foundation of the gallery. I hope to reveal key transformations in the morphology of the fine art field in Edinburgh between 1800 and 1859 using newspaper accounts, official records, reports and letters of the relevant institutions. While such formal records rarely give much away with respect to fully-formulated and coherent positions of social and aesthetic interest (rarely do official records make overly-judgmental claims on the worthiness of particular forms of art, for instance), it is possible to construct the shape of the field through an analysis of the position-takings of the most influential institutions. For as Bourdieu (1993) indicates, the structure of any field is dependent both on the internal distribution of possible positions and by the social characteristics of the agents occupying them. That is to say, the structure of the field at any given time is firmly reliant on the oppositions, combinations and altercations of the constituting agents or systems of agents. Here, Bourdieu uses the notion of force-field to characterise the artistic field as a locus of struggles between agents who use the force of their capital to maintain or improve their position within the field. These struggles are expressed in the conflicts between defenders of traditional, aristocratic structures of patronage and the makers and defenders of a modern art whose affinities lie with the professional bourgeoisie; in other words, between the orthodox ties of art and the heterodox challenges of a "heretical" group of artists and their new modes of practice. It is this conflict that constitutes the driving dialectic of

change not just in Edinburgh's fine art field, but in cultural fields in general:

...the process that carries works along is the product of the struggle among agents who, as a function of their position in the field, of their specified capital, have a stake in conservation, that is routine and routinisation, or in subversion, i.e., a return to sources, to an original purity, to heretical criticism, and so forth. (Bourdieu, 1993: 183)

Here, struggles which often take the form of demands for recognition, just as easily become struggles over the dominant criteria of legitimacy. Orthodox artists, connoisseurs or patrons endorse existing definitions, whereas heterodox artists, critics or patrons explicitly challenge the dominant standards and actively set out to revise the criteria that underpins the distribution of symbolic capital. Often, this attempt to impose a definition of legitimate practice - what is worthy art - overlays questions regarding the limits of the field itself and strategies to symbolically exclude practices and members from the game. In this sense, as Bourdieu explains, struggles over definitions between poets, novelists, ancients and moderns, are more than mere conflicts with words, they are actually "experienced by the protagonists as questions of life or death" (Bourdieu, 1991: 144).

The aim, then, is to unravel the stakes and tools used in the struggles to augment the interests of Edinburgh's art institutions by the middle of the nineteenth century and the resultant construction of a modern space of art. The movement towards a purer aesthetic, of the belief in setting art apart from other value spheres or forms of activity, was the manifestation of a cluster of ideas, personnel and institutions that marked the onset of conflict and fragmentation in Edinburgh's art field. This movement was tied up, in turn, with changes in the composition and power of Scotland's upper classes and the resources that certain factions could draw upon to affirm their own social and cultural interests. A desire to professionalise the field and encourage the market were the most visible aspects of this movement; but so was the re-profiling, by the 1840s, of the city's art field to accommodate the interests of its most powerful art institution, the Royal Scottish Academy.

Two advantages are gained from inspecting the records belonging to the four most relevant institutions in the art field: firstly, a nuanced "feel" for the whole field is afforded based on the intricate details of official discourse; and secondly, each interested

perspective can be assessed in a relational sense to the other positions, producing a more complete picture and broader overview of the field itself. This can then be contextualised with reference to the more general literature on Scottish cultural, social and economic history. The chapter is, therefore, an analysis of the changing configuration of the art world itself - its ideational, aesthetic and institutional arrangements.

My first task will be to introduce two key players in the field by way of a brief summary of their early constitution, interests and conflicts from 1819-1826. The second task will be to sketch out the ensuing struggle between these institutions from the late 1820s until the mid 1850s as a symbolic conflict over the status of art, artists and exhibitions. This will develop into a broader discussion of the role of the British State and the cultural movement of Romanticism as catalysts to the foundation of the gallery in 1850-51.

### **B: The Associated Society of Artists 1808-1813**

As indicated in the last chapter, Raeburn's efforts to promote the interests of professional artists resulted in the foundation of the Associated Society of Artists in 1808. This was the first artist-led institution of its kind in Scotland, and its remit included the annual exhibition of the modern pictures produced by mainly local artists in Raeburn's York Place studio. A small catalogue accompanied the exhibition, for which 2/-, or 5/- was charged and adverts placed in the city's main newspapers and journals. By all accounts the exhibitions comprised an eclectic mixture of genre scenes, portraits and Scottish landscapes which showed mainly to members of the *literati* and wealthy patrons in the capital. Indeed, the first ASA exhibition in 1808 was limited and rudimentary. As Thompson writes: "An impression is left of a trade shop window, with few exhibitors who had any very elevated notion of their vocation" (1972: 21), and even the catalogue decried the lack of quality in many of the pictures (Gordon, 1976).

However, the Associated Artists continued to exhibit every year in Raeburn's private studio until 1813 and, to an extent, heralded the beginnings of professionalization in art matters in Scotland. This is illustrated both by the rise in the status of artists themselves - Raeburn, Nasmyth and Wilkie being three of the most renowned painters

of the day - and the desire to found a life drawing class in the city, a proposal initially rejected by the Board of Manufactures. As Henry Cockburn wrote in his memorials, from 1810:

...the arts thus brought to light, advanced systematically, and there<sup>were</sup> more and better, and better paid artists in Edinburgh in the next ten or fifteen years than [sic] there had been in Scotland during the preceding century (quoted in Gordon, 1976, p. 5).

For the artists, however, there were still battles to be fought and obstacles to be overcome in Edinburgh. Indeed rather ironically, the biggest obstacle was the rise to power of another more traditional arts organization, the Institution for the Encouragement of Fine Arts in Scotland.

### **C: 1819-1826: the Institution for the Encouragement of Fine Arts in Scotland and the Associated Artists**

“Thus the crystalline purity of this aristocratic body was protected from all contact of pallet or brush!” (Monro, 1846: 104).

Following the example set by the British Institution for Promoting the Fine Arts in the United Kingdom, founded in London, the Institution for the Encouragement of Fine Arts in Scotland was set up in Edinburgh in 1819. The Institution had around one hundred and fifty members drawn from the nobility and aristocracy, each of whom subscribed twenty to twenty five guineas a year. The primary aim was to exhibit old master paintings - the private property of individual members - and to form a collection of ancient art, which was later to form part of the National Gallery collection. In 1819 the Institution held its first exhibition of old masters, based on a temporary transference of paintings from country to city: from Edinburgh’s surrounding country houses to Henry Raeburn’s gallery at York place, for which 1s. was charged for admission (NG3/1/1). Born of a private, aristocratic culture, the show’s commercial failure appeared to be tempered by the Institution’s pleasure at the more exclusive private evening viewings, and “by the attention of the higher classes” (NG3/1/1:10). A year later, attendance was further depleted, and, according to the sixpence catalogue, only twelve pictures were exhibited. These included a mix of seventeenth and eighteenth century generalised landscapes,



portraits, religious and classical scenes by the likes of Ruysdael, Titian, Rubens, Velasquez and Gavin Hamilton (EUL: Institution Catalogues and Misc. Pamphlets, 10/42-44: 7).

Clearly, the Institution's "natural" inclination was towards a set of traditional aesthetic values that pointed up its position as guardian of patrician culture. It spoke fondly of the Royal Academy and of the works of Reynolds, Gainsborough and Richard Wilson, spent time canvassing for the "interest of the nobility and gentry of Scotland in the objects of the Institution" (NG3/1/1: 48) and received the patronage of Prince George, as Regent, in 1819. Core members such as the Earl of Elgin, the Marquis of Queensberry, the Earl of Moray, the Earl of Penicuik and the Duke of Hamilton comprised a group of aristocratic patrons in the classical sense. Using the rhetoric of civic humanism and "disinterestedness", this coterie of dilettante strove to control the morphology of the art field and, in particular, the conduct of its artists. By 1820 the Institution was proposing the substitution of the work of living artists for ancient masters in the light of the lack of a steady, varied and popular supply of older works to the city. This was expedient for both parties: the artists gained exhibition space and potential patrons at a time when the market was still in its infancy, and the patrons exploited the growing popularity of modern art in Edinburgh to convey their self-perceived status as the field's chief sponsors, despite their allegiance to a more antiquated system of patronage. That the artists themselves were growing increasingly wary of the Institution's control is indicated by the gradual divide between the two constituencies from the late 1820s. For now, however, patrons and artists had little choice but to use each other in order to bolster their own relative positions within the field.

From 1820 until 1831, then, Edinburgh played host to modern exhibitions on a scale unmatched in Scotland up to that point. The venue was changed from 1821-1826 to galleries at Waterloo Place in order to make room for larger audiences and for the growing number of modern works submitted (around two hundred by the mid-1820s). The exhibitions were a success, attracting local art buyers and proving to be somewhat of a shop-window for portraitists, landscapists and genre artists. Popular artists of the 1820s included Alexander Nasmyth and his sons, Walter Geickie, William Simson,

William Allan, Henry Raeburn and George Watson. Many painted accessible subjects - local views, commissioned portraits, cottage scenes, "sleeping girls" - in a direct style that suited the growing middle class audience. But exhibitions were still run under the Institution's auspices, so whilst sixteen artists were admitted as associate members in 1823, these were excluded from any form of management or control, such as hanging procedures.<sup>1</sup> Professional men, suggested the Institution, could not be trusted to wield voting rights with the requisite "disinterestedness" that connoted aristocratic conduct. A minute of a Directors' Meeting in January 1825 explains:

It was, from the original formation of the Institution, considered important to place it under the sole direction of men of such rank and station in the country as to prevent the possibility of any personal views ever being attributed to their management; being well aware, that however disinterestedly professional men might be disposed to acquit themselves of such a charge, they could seldom escape the injurious surmises of many as to the motives of their conduct...no Artist shall be capable of being elected on any committee or of voting as a Governor while he continues to be a professional Artist (NG3/1/1: 120-1).

Control of the Institution's affairs, instead, resided in an inner circle of aristocratic directors, whose confidence, wealth and connections with the Board of Manufacturers served to place the Institution towards the centre of the field in the 1820s. Indeed by 1826 the Institution was calling for the reintroduction of annual shows that displayed "pictures preserved in private collections country halls or colleges" (NG3/1/1: 134). For it was in the display and judgment of ancient art, the Institution asserted - a practice "more generally inherent in the well educated class of society" - that higher and "purer" standards of taste could be reached ("pure", meaning, here, divested of the kinds of "gratuitous", pecuniary, impulses that drove artists and free of circumstantial details and reference to the particular). Predictably, when modern Scottish artists were praised, it was the likes of Jacob More, Gavin Hamilton and Alexander Runciman, with their classical abstractions and connections to "the most esteemed masters of the ancient and foreign schools" who were singled out (EUL: Institution Catalogues and Misc.

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<sup>1</sup> The list of sixteen included the future President of the Academy William Allan, the landscapist Alexander Nasmyth, the dealer Andrew Wilson, Sam Joseph and the future architect of the buildings on the Mound, William Henry Playfair.

Pamphlets: 10).

By 1825 the Institution's position was further buttressed by an application for a Royal Charter and the implementation of a purchasing policy for old masters, prints, casts and books, secured by dealers sent to London and Paris. Since the French invasions of Italy, some important works had become available, and the Institution wasted no time in commissioning the dealer Andrew Wilson to procure pictures such as van Dyck's *Lomellini Family* and a picture ascribed to Jacopo Bassano.



Figure 45: *The Lomellini Family*, Sir Anthony Van Dyck, c. 1623-27

Talk was of fostering a "Gallery of National Importance" under the dominion of the Institution and of raising the taste of artists by providing them with traditional examples that would inspire history painting (Thompson, 1972). Royal incorporation was achieved in 1827 and work begun on the construction of a new dedicated building designed by William Henry Playfair, built at the head of the Mound and named after the new "Royal Institution".





Figure 46: *Princes Street with the Royal Institution Building under Construction*, Alexander Nasmyth, 1825

Built in Doric style, with eight front columns and a portico, the building was to eventually house several semi-national institutions of learning and commerce in the city, including the Society of Antiquaries and the Royal Society. The Board of Manufactures, whose responsibilities had been re-defined by directives in 1828 to include the fine arts, was given overall charge of the building, which was completed in time for the Royal Institution's fifth exhibition of modern pictures in February 1826. The Board also footed what amounted to a £47,000 bill and took residence in the building. Accommodation for exhibitions and the Board's Trustee's Academy was provided in the double-storey building and additional rooms for a library and committee room built. The western side of the building comprised rooms for the Royal Society, for which it paid rent. The Royal Institution's galleries took centre stage, for which it paid a rent of £380 to the Board.



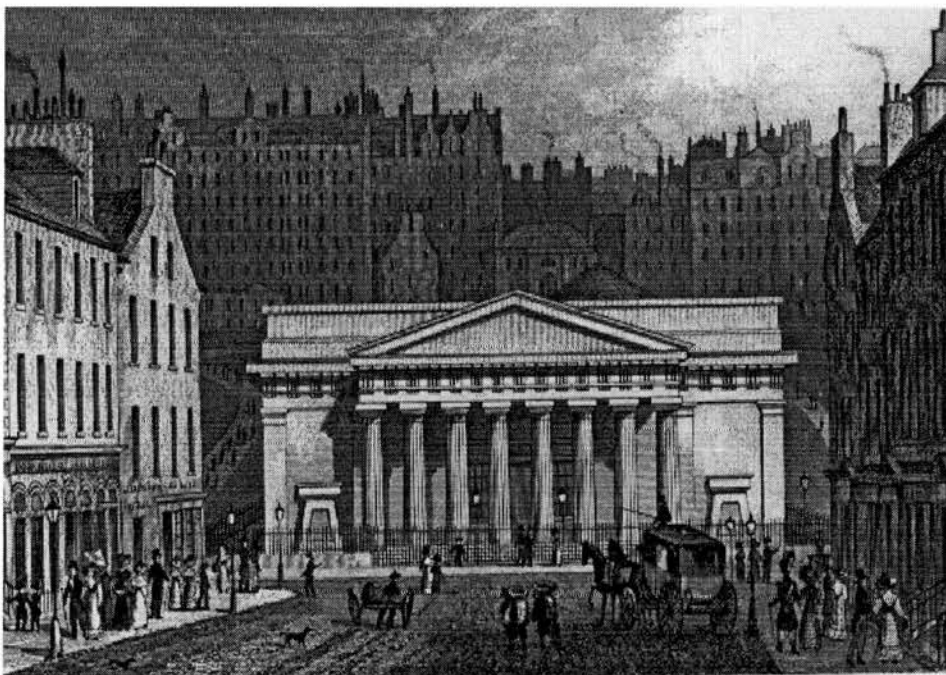


Figure 47: The Royal Institution Building, built by William Henry Playfair, completed 1826, engraving by S. Lacy

The self-congratulatory tempo of the Royal Institution's reports at this time indicates an organization at the height of its powers in the art field. It wasted no time in clarifying its intention "not as a Society of Artists, but for their benefit" (EUL: Catalogues and Misc. Pamphlets, vol. 10, 10/42-44), reiterating its desire to set up a permanent gallery and academy to train artists in its own image.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, the artists' own energies towards independence and power were bearing less official fruit with the news that their application for Incorporation had been scuppered, in turn fuelling rumours that the Board of Manufactures and Royal Institution had short-circuited their application in order to retain a monopoly over the art field in the city.<sup>3</sup> In fact, the ties between the Royal Institution and the Board of Manufactures were

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<sup>2</sup> "It is well known that there were not formerly to be found in this city any rooms which were at the same time calculated for the exhibition of the works of art", opined the Royal Institution, whose new building was to further "the advancement of art, as exhibited by the successful efforts of our native artists and the rapid progress of improvement with which the present period seems peculiarly marked" (NG3/1/1: 151).

<sup>3</sup> The Academy complained that its first petition for a Royal Charter was rejected on the grounds that the Scottish Lord Advocate, Lord Meadowbank, had interfered. The Prime Minister, Robert Peel, believed the Academy to have "the interests of the Fine Arts in Scotland most

particularly strong. The Institution received its grant from the Board and cross-membership between them was high. While the Board was not merely a one-dimensional vehicle for classical aristocratic power (as argued above, the encouragement of Scotland's economic infrastructure and its design school indicated a more commercially aware compact civil elite, and at times the Board acted more like a pendulum, swinging expediently between the state, the artists and the patrons) it was very much open to the influence of the Institution.<sup>4</sup> Social trends suggested that landed power in Scotland - based on inheritance, old ties, land rights and property - was still significant by the second decade of the nineteenth century (Devine, 1990).

Members such as Lord Elgin, the Duke of Hamilton, Lord Abercromby, Sir Henry Jardine, the Earl of Rosebery, Sir W Arbuthnot (Lord Provost of Edinburgh) and Lord Meadowbank were active across both institutions and wielded substantial institutional weight in Scotland. Indeed it was Meadowbank, who later became Solicitor General and Lord Advocate for Scotland, who had replied negatively to a suggestion that the artists of Scotland might do well to organize themselves into an academy, "since the number of artists of eminence in Scotland was very limited". Echoing the sentiments regarding the "interested" disposition of artists, Meadowbank possessed "very great doubts about the wisdom of handing to the artists the promotion and interests of Art", instead reaffirming the impartial qualities of the Royal Institution's aristocratic members (cited in Gordon, 1976: 15). A further affront to the artists took the form of an exclusion from free access to the new galleries built on the Mound, reserving such privileges for

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sincerely at heart, and that, had it not been for the 'decided and unequivocal opinion' of the Lord Advocate 'that it would not be expedient for the Secretary of State to advise his majesty to grant a Charter of Incorporation to the members of the Scottish Academy' he would have most cheerfully recommended that Association to the protection and patronage of the Throne" (Annual Report, 1828: 21). This situation recalls the autonomy which Scotland had over its art matters in this period - that the Prime Minister and his Westminster advisors left decisions regarding patronage to indigenous personnel. But even though the Lord Advocate held an official post as controller of Scottish society, he was also a member of the Board of Trustees and the Royal Institution. Hence his decisions in art matters were clearly swayed.

<sup>4</sup> Particularly the request from the Institution of 1829 "that the Board would place themselves more immediately in connection with the Institution, as it might tend to the advantages of the objects pursued by both" (NG1/2/8: May 1829).

the Life Governors only. All of which was topped by the inconsistencies over the status and whereabouts of proceeds taken from the previous modern exhibitions that were to be injected into a separate fund for artists. From 1826 a series of memos and letters circulated between the three institutions that heralded the onset of overt conflict in Edinburgh and mobilised the artists into a more cohesive and offensive position in the field.<sup>5</sup>

For a while, public battle had been joined in the city's newspapers between the patrons and artists: both claimed rights to the exhibition funds, and cast aspersions on the taste and propriety of the other. As far back as 1825, a letter signed by Samuel Joseph, Hugh William Williams, W. J. Thompson, William Allan, William Nicholson, J. F. Williams and Alexander Nasmyth - all Associated Artists - raised "doubts whether the Institution, in its present state, is of any material advantage to the Fine Arts in Scotland...there is no inducement held out to Scotch Artists, to send their works to the Institution, more than to any other Exhibition in which they have no concern" (NG3/7/3/18: 11). Henceforth, the layered antagonisms of social class, aesthetics and institutional conduct had ceased to be latent, and spilled copiously into the city's public sphere.

#### **D: 1826-1834: the Birth of the Scottish Academy and the Royal Institution in Decline**

Galvanised by the perceived injustice enacted on the faction, a breakaway group of twenty-four artists tendered their resignation from the Institution and canvassed others to withhold pictures from the Institution's modern exhibitions in order to gain independence from aristocratic tutelage.<sup>6</sup> In May 1826, the first general meeting of "The

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<sup>5</sup> According to the artists, the Institution had promised support for Scottish artists and, in the 1826 catalogue of modern pictures the possibility of an amelioration fund for artists and their families was raised (SRO, Catalogues and Misc. Pamphlets, 10/42-44). From the artists' perspective, this proposal was reneged, despite the popularity and commercial success of the modern exhibitions comprised of their works. In fact, the Royal Institution had decided to pool all profits made in the modern exhibitions into a general fund, without separation, to be expended "in whatever manner shall seem advisable to the directors" (NG3/1/1: 155).

<sup>6</sup> The Associated Artists also drew the Royal Institution's attention to the fact that a share of control and management of the Royal Academy in London was given to the artists: "The funds,

Scottish Academy of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture” was held, with the artist George Watson as president elect, William Nicholson as Secretary and Thomas Hamilton as Treasurer. Academicians were to pay twenty-five guineas for membership and governance of the institution was to rest in the hands of a central council, the President and the collective body of the Academicians. Three categories of membership were announced, as with the Royal Academy: academicians, associates and associate engravers, although the Scottish Academy was significantly different from the London institution in terms of social composition, power and aesthetic motivation (it was certainly less patrician). As the Scottish Academy was attempting to hive off a professional sphere of artistic value that would recognise art *qua* art, certain guidelines were laid down in order to restrict the kinds of objects that would be exhibited. This represented a concerted lurch away from the pre-modern conception of art as a dedicated and functional activity or craft and indicated the academy’s desire to police the boundaries of fine art itself. As long as art was attached to the imperatives of a patronal system of demand, art was presumed to “sink to the level of the mechanic trades and handicrafts” (Roundrobin, 1826: 47). Instead, the Academy laid down procedures that would exclude from exhibition needle-work, shell-work, artificial flowers, cut paper and models in coloured wax, on the grounds of artistic specialisation, much to the consternation of the Board of Manufactures, whose remit had been to encourage the “useful arts” and “artisans” (NG1/2/8).

The Academy’s inaugural exhibition of 1827 comprised two hundred and eighty two paintings and seventeen sculptures sent by sixty-seven artists from Scotland and England. These included around ninety-five landscapes and one hundred portraits, most of which had been pre-commissioned and sold (to professionals, middle-class patrons and to titled ladies and gentlemen) (RSA catalogue, 1827). Held at the Waterloo Place gallery, the exhibition’s entrance accounts amounted to £350, with £560 being raised

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under their administration, have been very prosperous, and the produce of the exhibitions show, that, on the whole, the business is well conducted” (NG3/7/3/18: 11). In reply the Royal Institution charged the artists with “misleading the public”, by aligning their procedures with the Royal Academy, when it was the sister organisation, the British Institution for the Encouragement of Fine Arts that was the template for the Institution (NG3/7/1).



from the sales of pictures.

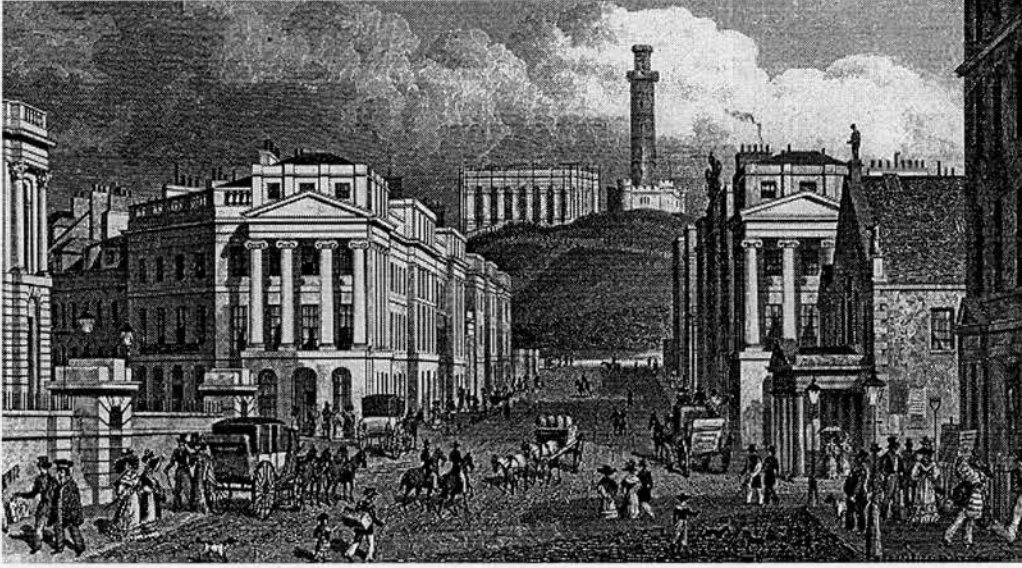


Figure 48: Waterloo Place, Calton Hill, etc, c. 1830, drawn by T. H. Shepherd

Visits to and sales from the Scottish Academy's exhibition increased markedly in the following year, prompting the Academy to claim it to be "the most numerous Exhibition of Works of Art which has ever taken place in Scotland." (RSA Annual Report, 1828). Predictably, the catalogue attacked the Royal Institution as an "auxiliary" that "ought not to supersede or repress the combined efforts of the artists themselves"; and reiterated professional autonomy as a cause worthy of struggle (quoted in Holme, 1907: x).<sup>7</sup> Now, however, the Academy was emphasising the distinction of its own social position in relation to the possession of specialised knowledge and taste. *Pace* Bourdieu, the artists' symbolic capital resided in their mastery of a newer game of art that had growing currency throughout Britain: of art as a specialised realm of meaning and classification and of artists as a distinct category of producers of symbolic goods. In the Academy's view this necessitated lectures in aspects of painting, drawing, perspective and anatomy, a library and a school for aspiring professional artists, all for which the academy

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<sup>7</sup> As one commentator expressed this desire for autonomy in a letter to the Royal Institution: "you have assumed the office of guardian to a full grown, vigorous fellow, full of life and spirit, conscious of his own importance, anxious for independence, impatient of restraint, and disdaining the trammels of authority, as may be expected in one who has been long accustomed to be his own master, to think and act for himself, and impressed with the idea that he is fully able to do so" (Roundrobin, 1826: 49).

petitioned money from the Board of Manufactures.

As Lang has written, “the artist can work for the culture of the upper strata of society until the culture of his own class becomes conscious and demanding” (1973: 151). Such was the case by the 1830s as the Scottish Academy gradually augmented its stakes in the art field.<sup>8</sup> Artists who previously had sought patronage under the auspices of the aristocratic Royal Institution now flocked to the Academy and its desire to replace the culture of an aristocracy with an “aristocracy of culture” (Fyfe, 1993). For painting, in the academy’s eyes, could no longer reside in the sphere of the “unpractised Amateur” - the task would therefore be to reconceptualise art in terms of pictorial meaning and the artist’s own authority (RSA Annual Report, 1825: 9). Unlike France, however, this wasn’t to be achieved centrally, through strict procedures of training and normalisation laid down by an official state-backed institution, but by a steady professionalisation in civic-artistic life that grew out of a struggle for recognition and autonomy. In this sense, academy artists in Scotland were the most “radical” in the field - not yet the epitome of conservative academicism, nor artistic representatives of aristocratic ascription (like the Royal Academy up to the mid- nineteenth century) but members of a popular, urban, artistic assembly whose attacks on the traditional Royal Institution were assertions of an almost romantic conception of the artist.

Such a conception was increasingly homologous with the sensibilities of Edinburgh’s own bourgeois audience. Hence, enthusiastic acclaim greeted the Scottish Academy’s annual exhibitions in the city’s press and in art journalism. One critic enthused:

Our Art and Exhibitions are unquestionably the best things our country can boast. Put together our yearly crop of books, forensic speeches, and pulpit preachments, consider them, and then pass into the Academy’s exhibition, and admit that the artists are clearly our best and cleverest of men (Iconoclast, 1860: 4).

In contrast, the Royal Institution’s civic popularity was being undermined by the growing

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<sup>8</sup> The addresses of Academy members in the capital indicates a group comprised of the comfortable middle class, possessed of a degree of social acceptability and enjoying a bourgeois lifestyle (see Gordon, 1976).

antipathy towards aristocratic grandeur and older vestiges of patronal control. One newspaper account of the time, for instance, read: "To find such a body pluming itself upon its high honours and lofty position, and insulting the individuals to whom it is indebted for all that it possesses, is, indeed, a marvellous and somewhat revolting spectacle" (Monro, 1846: 110-111). Another charged the Institution with exploiting public amenities for private purposes.<sup>9</sup> With the weight of this tide against them, the Royal Institution rescinded claims to the profits from the modern exhibitions in the summer of 1829, promising to make the library, life academy and collection available to the artists, and agreed in principle to provide exhibition space for the academy. By the following year the Institution was requesting assurances from the Academy that some members would still be sending works to the Institution's annual exhibitions, lest the whole event would dessicate. The Academy's reply - "they could not support the ensuing exhibition at the Royal Institution, without materially injuring the establishment with which they are more immediately connected"(cited in Home, 1908: xii) - indicated an inversion of power between patrons and artists.

The growing strength of the Academy, therefore, fed off the flowering confidence of the artists as a coherent social interest group, or a faction in the field, whose position-takings appeared more and more to be supported by social trends in Scotland as a whole. The evolution of a distinct middle-class culture was gradual and complex but nonetheless detectable across a broad range of urban social institutions and discourses, partly undermining the traditional authority of the landed classes, particularly from early to mid-century. In religion, politics and law as well as intellectual thought, cultural consumption and education, middle-class interest was clearly gaining sway by the 1830s (Nenadic, 1988). Underlying this new found confidence was the general expansion of middle-class occupations with advances in domestic and overseas trade and the growth in urban

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<sup>9</sup> *The Scotsman* declared: "[the Directors] have given offence by having evening promenades exclusively for themselves and their friends. Had this been done in any of their own houses, or in rooms hired at their own cost, they might have been as select and exclusive as they pleased...but when they did this in the Exhibition Rooms, while the pictures were there, and to be seen in a light to which all had not access on equal terms, the public we think, had reason to complain" (*The Scotsman*, 25th March, 1826).

manufacturing in Scotland's central belt. It was also, of course, validated politically by the Great Reform Act of 1832, the Scottish version of which was drawn up by Henry Cockburn, legal champion of the Academy (Cockburn, 1854). Clearly, ruralism and aristocratic traditions, however melded they were to compact enlightenment culture, could not remain dominant in an increasingly urban-centred society forever. Art itself was a site of competing class allegiances and used to facilitate the constitution of a more distinct sphere of professional, bourgeois values. Hence Cockburn's summation of the Royal Institution can be read as a broader declaration of confidence in a progressive (Whiggish) constellation of values in distinction to the vestiges of aristocratic control in the spheres of politics and culture:

Begun under great names, it had one defect and one vice. The defect was that it did, and was calculated to do, little or nothing for art except by its exhibitions of ancient pictures which could not possibly be kept up for long, for the supply of pictures was soon exhausted. A rooted jealousy of our living artists as a body (not individually) by the few persons who led the institution was its vice. These persons were fond of art no doubt, but fonder of power, and tried indirectly to crush all living art, and its professors, that ventured to flourish except under their sunshine. The result was that in a few years they had not a living artist connected with them. Their tyranny produced the Academy; and then having disgusted the only persons on whose living merit they could depend, the institution itself sank into obscurity and uselessness (Cockburn, 1856: 49).

This was the beginning of the end of the aristocratic Institution. After attempting some rapprochement with the artists, and half-heartedly purchasing some modern pictures, recourse was eventually made to ancient art once more. The Institution's 1832 exhibition of old masters at the Royal Institution galleries was conspicuous defiance in the light of the Academy's new-found success. This was to be the start of a national collection of the "best examples of art", declared the Institution, not merely "public spectacle" (a sleight on the popularity of the Academy's shows). The exhibition included *The Lomellini Family* by van Dyck, *Lady at her Toilet* by Paris Bordone and various classical scenes, devotional pictures and grand portraits attributed to the likes of Titian, Bassano and Shustermans. But only thirty nine pictures are listed in the catalogue and the whole event



was far less popular in the city than the academy's efforts.<sup>10</sup> The Academy was even outshining the Institution with respect to the purchase of high profile pictures. Its acquisition of a Rubens and several pictures by William Etty indicated the Academy's symbolic achievements in the field. Etty's *Judith and Holofernes* and *The Combat*, in particular, were significant guarantors of permanence and success in the Academy's eyes, given Etty's renown and professional standing at the time.<sup>11</sup> The Institution's position, on the other hand, waned, despite its connections and possession of a £500 annual state grant.

So, where once the pact between *literati* and landed had melded enlightenment culture, now the relative divergences between the older vestiges of a lesser and middling aristocracy and a newer more progressive bourgeois class were apparent. In effect, the key stimulant for motoring the art field in the early nineteenth century was conflict between two classes previously co-existing in harmony. Certainly the pointed struggles between orthodoxy and heresy, subversion and conservation, which, for Bourdieu (1993), represents a critical force in the evolution of the art field in France was really the principal factor in the development of national art institutions in Scotland. In particular, the accelerated move away from an outmoded conception of art as craft, symbol of aristocratic virtue or handmaiden to patrician living was subject increasingly to the attacks of artists and critics who were aiming to insert art into a more professional field made possible by the market and by another crucial catalyst - Romanticism.

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<sup>10</sup> The Institution rued the fact in 1832 that "the Exhibitions of modern art confined to objects of local acquaintance, and to efforts of local genius seem to be considerably more attractive to the public in general than the productions of the great Masters however eminent...with exhibitions of ancient art...it must be confessed that public taste is still so far behind as to take comparatively but small interest and accordingly the returns of last years exhibitions were found to produce simply sufficient to pay the expense of the necessary attendance" (NG3/1/1: 325). The Academy's own exhibition of 1829, in contrast, took receipts of £798 and sold £1,000 worth of pictures.

<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Etty visited the Academy in 1844 and praised the artists for their "independent exertion of mind unawed by fear and uninfluenced by favour...the Artists...are undoubtedly the best judges of what Art requires." (Reprinted in Monro, 1844: appendix XXII: 110)

## **E: The Edinburgh Art Union, Romanticism and Landscape Painting in Early Nineteenth Century Scotland**

“The interference of patrons, in the character of guardians, is no longer admissible, and would therefore be impertinent. The arts have come of age, and can manage themselves.” (Monro, 1846: 113)

Part of the impetus for the rise to power of the Royal Scottish Academy came from the formation of an organization which was to have vital effects on the intensification of the modern art market from the 1830s on - the Association for the Promotion of Fine Arts in Scotland, or the Edinburgh Art Union. One of the first such unions in Britain, the Association, founded in 1834, boasted up to 6,000 members world-wide and extended the patronage principle to a more middle-class public in the city. The Association based its very existence in principles of popular ownership and the failures of state patronage:

In most other countries of Europe, where intelligence, liberality and refinement prevail, Painting, Sculpture and Architecture are under the patronage of the state and the sovereign; and it is always deeply to be regretted when a government does not appear to be sufficiently alive to the national importance of cherishing the Fine Arts. But the Association, by interesting the population at large, and by securing the dispersion of numerous works of Art throughout the country, does more than any Government could do towards extending among the people of Scotland such a love of art as must conduce to their own enjoyment and happiness, and to the proper encouragement of its professors. (Annual Report, 1837-38: 4)

Members of the Association subscribed a guinea a year, the money being used to buy modern art, mainly landscapes, from the Academy exhibitions. The Association comprised a mix of lesser aristocracy, financiers, professionals and merchants, although a distinction was clear between the middle class populism of the general membership and the more high-standing committee who chose the pictures and dictated policy. Members were provided with popular engravings and the chance to win a painting in the annual lottery and helped the artists gain prime position in the field by buying Academy pictures and distributing them by lot to subscribers (by 1839 the Association was already spending just under £3000 at the Academy exhibition). It also formed a fund to purchase selected pictures to become part of the National Gallery of Scotland's collection. These were the new patrons: modern, market-led and favouring the immediacy of localised pictures and

genre scenes. Indeed, it was the Union that helped to support an emerging vision of the professional Scottish artist and of landscape painting in particular, based in the idiom of Romanticism.

Romanticism did not spring fully formed in early nineteenth-century Scotland, but came to develop during the latter half of the eighteenth century as a response to similar social and cultural conditions faced by a number of Western societies. The paradox of its inception turns on the fact that it developed in the Enlightenment period of order, rationality, science and reason. In a sense, of course, it was a pointed repudiation of these values - a "counter-movement" which stressed the mind, feeling, subjectivity and expressive freedom. There was, however, a complex intermeshing of Enlightenment and Romanticism which raises the possibility that Romanticism was the "revolutionary reawakening of Enlightenment" (Brown, 1993: 46).<sup>12</sup> Still, the gradual shift to a romantic "structure of feeling" in Scotland did parallel the slow waning of empiricism and the certainties of a "stable" civil society in tandem with rapidly changing social, economic and political conditions.<sup>13</sup>

Romanticism in Scotland was given early expression through the work of certain writers whose elegiac scenes and characters were informed by an aristocratic rural simplicity. John Home's *Douglas* (1756) and MacPherson's translations of the poems of *Ossian* (1760s) portrayed a poetic Highland past and a remote, exotic world of rugged landscapes peopled by grand heroic characters. The popularity of these writings

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<sup>12</sup> Hume's dictum that "Reason is and should be the slave of passions" is a cursory indication of this relationship, but so is the landscape painter, Alexander Nasmyth's career and the modes of fancy, history, realism and social observation that intermeshed in the work of Sir Walter Scott (Lukács, 1962).

<sup>13</sup> It is with this transformation in mind that Becker writes: "Were Adam Smith and his fellow economists and moral philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment writing in the 1830s rather than in the 1750s and 60s, their observations would have had a very different historical colouration. Scottish cities of the first part of the nineteenth century were beset with problems of poverty, sanitation, and the terrible incidence of cholera...But of course they wrote and thought in a different age when a burgeoning civil society was nurtured by gentle rains and not yet tested by battering winds." (Becker, 1994: 125).

coincided with the nadir of Romanticism.<sup>14</sup> By the early nineteenth century, Scotland, in Hook's words, was a "kind of romantic archetype", "the most romantic country in the world", whose "mythopoeic vision" was embodied in the works of the "Wizard of the North" - Sir Walter Scott (Hook, 1989: 317, 318, 316).

Scott's presence towers gigantically over nineteenth century Scotland and it would be impossible to do justice to his significance here. The popularity of novels such as *Waverley* in 1814 and *The Heart of Midlothian* in 1818 has been attributed to Scott's focus on historical detail, costume and local setting. But equally significant was the bourgeois, quotidian quality of Scott's output, the inclusion of "common" or "middle of the road" heroes and the demise of the exclusive values of landed society (Lukacs, 1962: 33). Scott exemplified the fact that Romanticism was a middle-class movement - the "middle-class literary school par excellence, the school which had broken for good with the conventions of classicism, courtly-aristocratic rhetoric and pretence, with elevated style and refined language" (Hauser, 1962: 166).

In the visual arts, the transition from the smooth and pleasing views of the picturesque to the more romantic trope of landscape representation followed the path which Scott had forged in his descriptions of wild, barren landscapes. Scott's literary evocations of the minutiae of highland scenery: "ledges of rock", "healthy and savage mountains, on the crests of which the morning mist was still sleeping", "imperceptible notches", "huge precipices", "crag[s] of huge size presented in gigantic bulk" (Scott, 1814: 144-5, 175), were firmly ensconced in the public imagination. Illustrations to Scott's texts by Joseph Turner, who collaborated with him in 1818, and the Reverend John Thomson of Duddingston, an Edinburgh landscapist and minister of the Kirk who illustrated Scott's books on Scottish antiquities and scenery, began to convey a new enthusiasm for the bleak, stern, bold and solitary. Central to this enthusiasm was the unconventional style of rendering accidental effects in nature and the expression of subjective states and personal responses.

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<sup>14</sup> So whilst Ramsay's *The Gentle Shepherd* was written in 1725, the height of its fame was between 1780 and 1820 when romantic attitudes began to take hold in literature and the arts.





Figure 49: *Fast Castle From Below*, Rev John Thomson, c. 1824

Thomson's expressive handling of weather and sea effects has been termed "the first thoroughly Romantic treatment of Scottish scenery" (Williams and Brown, 1993: 133). But it was Turner's vigorous depictions of the maelstrom of nature in the Highlands; of nature as awe-inspiring and infinite, quasi-divine and transcendent, which provided the most full-blooded treatment of Scott's vision.



Figure 50: *Glencoe*, Joseph Turner, c. 1833

The key ingredient to early nineteenth-century landscapes turned on the affirmation of subjectivity, of individual expression and feeling, of weather conditions, moods and affections. This paralleled the loosening of patronage as Academy artists were able to escape from aristocratic directives, practice in a variety of styles and produce for an anonymous market. Romanticism helped to further break down the hierarchy of genres according to which “Grand Manner” or “history-painting” had been presumed to be qualitatively superior to such genres as still-life and landscape. As a rule, artistic value was coming to depend on individual subjectivity and creativity as expressed in a swelling body of art criticism. Articles and commentaries in newspapers (the exhibition reviews in the *Edinburgh Evening Courant* from 1840-1859, for example), focused with enthusiasm on aspects of expression, genius and monadic authorship in describing the Academy exhibitions.

By the 1840s, landscape pictures in Scotland wholeheartedly embodied the “rugged”, “realistic” and “detailed” tendencies which were present in Scott. Shifts in ideas on landscape to the sublime aesthetic were supported by the rise of scenic tourism, itself dependent on improved communications which made the Highlands accessible by train in the 1840s (Withers, 1992). Pictures still aimed to convey “feeling”, but in the Victorian period this was subjugated to the aim of conveying particularity and detail in recognisably local settings. Once characterized as vulgar, barren and barbarous by followers of the picturesque aesthetic, the mountains of the Highlands were now *de rigueur*. They represented solitude, the imagination, the soul, the infinite and the unyielding. They became the repository of a mythologized Scotland as the area was emptied and exploited for commercial gain.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> “We have reason to be proud of our northern land”, opined one Academy review, “not only because it numbers many native painters of unchallenged excellence, but because its whole people are generally conscious of the magnificence that has its home in our ‘Caledonia stern, and wild, fit nurse for a poetic child’” (*Edinburgh News and Literary Chronicle*, Saturday, March 26, 1859).



Figure 51: *Inverlochy Castle*, Horatio McCulloch, 1857

Horatio McCulloch (1805-67) was the most popular high romantic landscape painter in Scotland. His idealized and particularized depictions of the Highlands from the 1840s eventually epitomized, along with Edwin Landseer, Scotland's abiding image, from within and outwith.<sup>16</sup> McCulloch was born in Glasgow but painted for most of his life in Edinburgh and gave true visual form to Scotland as "land of the mountain and the flood". Like other landscapists, McCulloch staged the Highlands as spatial repositories of counter-civilization; of the pathos of a conquered province, but through a one-dimensional aesthetic which actually glossed over the trace of the modernizing hand, urbanism and the rural poor.<sup>17</sup> The bourgeois penchant for verisimilitude and detail - the

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<sup>16</sup> To this extent, McCulloch came to play a similar role in Scotland that Constable had played in England, but using Highland mountains instead of rustic settings and rolling valleys (Errington, 1978).

<sup>17</sup> The export of black cattle, the commercial programme of enclosure and modern techniques of commercial agriculturalism, which transformed the Scottish countryside from the late eighteenth century, for instance, were disavowed. As Nenadic suggests in this connection: "The speed and extent of change, coupled with the existence within Scotland - in the Highlands to be precise - of the purest European manifestation of the romantic ideals of the undisturbed,



development of photography under the direction of D.O. Hill in Scotland is a parallel development - found expression in McCulloch's exact observations of individual elements in the landscape. His portrayal of variations in the texture and surface appearance of rocks, water and greenery, for instance, exemplified a fidelity to the details of nature which reached an apogee in the 1850s and 1860s with followers of Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood ("we do not know a landscape foreground more truly perfect in its vigorous management of colour than this 'Clyde' of Horatio McCulloch", said the *Edinburgh Evening News and Literary Chronicle*, Saturday, March 26th, 1859).



Figure 52: *Christ as the Man of Sorrows*, William Dyce, 1860

Exemplifying the thirst for landscape pictures were the actions of the previously mentioned Association for the Promotion of Fine Arts, (the Edinburgh Art Union) from the mid-1830s. Before 1842, of the £22,000 spent on painting and sculpture of all types, about £12,700 had been spent on landscapes of one sort or another. And some of the highest prices paid were for landscape works. Especially adored were John Thomson and

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sublime landscape and primitive peoples, grasped the attention of Scots, English and Europeans alike; not least because such ideals of landscape and people, which were constantly invoked by fiction and art as an integral part of Scottish national identity, were being rapidly destroyed by advancing capitalism" (1994: 166). Pringle, similarly, asserts that "the Highland myth veiled the harsh realities of Scottish urban existence and helped propagate an increasingly regional image of a tranquil rural Scotland" (1988: 153).



Horatio McCulloch and the works of these artists were often engraved and distributed among subscribers. In 1837-38, for instance, McCulloch's "Loch-an-Eilin" was chosen to be engraved by the Association, whose committee justified the choice in the following terms:

The recommendation this year was, that a work should be selected from the landscape department, which had long flourished in Scotland, and it would have been strange to him [the secretary of the committee] if it had not done so in a country such as this - a country the fit nurse of poetical imaginations - *the land of the mountain and the flood; a land which contains within itself all the features of loneliness, of majesty, and sublimity; a land whose grandeur and beauty, both in the Lowlands and Highlands, has been increased by the increase of knowledge, and the progress of art, the useful arts themselves having shed additional beauty and grandeur on the beautiful and sublime features of nature* (Annual Report, 1837-38, 124; my emphasis).

Similar tones of Romanticism coloured the activities of the Union throughout the period in question and fuelled the purchase of localized, detailed and "sentimental" landscapes and seascapes. Academy artists quickly tapped into this burgeoning market, producing not for a sole patron but for the more impersonal market.<sup>18</sup> The takings at Academy summer exhibitions which hardly reached £400 in the early 1830s, had risen to over £4,000 by 1838, including nearly £3,000 spent by the Association. Artists tended to paint what they knew they could sell at exhibitions. And what they could sell at exhibitions, apart from portraiture, which was always popular, was landscape painting, broadly in the romantic/ realist idiom. Royal Scottish Academy catalogues, for example, show a rising quantity of localized, often Highland scenes from the 1830s, with titles such as: "River Scene in Argyllshire", "Scene at Pass of Ben-Cruachan", or "Ben Nevis - Scene after a Thunder Shower". Indeed, by 1838, academy artists were clearly exploiting this thirst in the market, necessitating the Union to complain that artists had put up their prices and that art was in danger of becoming a "matter of traffic" (Royal Association Annual Report, 1838-39: 16-17).

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<sup>18</sup> As one Academy artist was to describe this perfunctory process: "One day two active members of the Association for the Promotion of the Fine Arts displayed an unwanted interest in them [pictures], and next morning I learned that the Association had determined to 'promote' the Fine Arts with my water-butts, and had bought them, along with a number of very similar pictures" (Anonymous, 1889: 164).

Inspecting the broad effects which Romanticism had on the art world in Edinburgh yields a further observation. In Campbell's *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (1987) the author makes a connection between modern consumption habits in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and the cultural movement of Romanticism which "introduced the modern doctrines of self-expression and fulfilment" (1983: 279). Following Weber's thesis on Calvinism as the spirit motivating the pursuit of wealth, Campbell's key claim is that the necessary motivations for a modern consumer society, which emerged alongside that of the modern producer society in Europe from 1750 to 1850, can be found in the doctrines of Romanticism. The romantic emphasis on individual uniqueness, experience, feeling and detail provided, for Campbell, an intellectual justification for the consumptive mode - the limitless desire "for more novel and varied consumptive experiences" (1983: 282). Freeing up the tropes of self-expression and individualism also shifted the treatment of consumption away from utility and morality towards an end in itself. The powerful notion of subjectively-apprehended experience, in other words, along with that which affirmed the "freedom of the artist to create without hindrance from traditional, moral or religious taboos and restrictions" (1983: 289), naturally induced forms of "consumer sovereignty" in early nineteenth-century Britain - in particular, the freedom of the consumer *vis-a-vis* cultural products.

So, we might usefully make sense of the rapid concentration and aggrandizement of the art market in the early nineteenth century by suggesting that individuals and artistic societies with the economic means to purchase works of art, were now given the ideational motivations to do so with Romanticism. Despite, on the surface, perhaps disapproving of the "will to possess" luxury goods like art (given the continued distrust of luxury and conspicuous consumption and the Presbyterian emphasis on temperance), like the Calvinists' own unintended actions on the economic system, the unforeseen consequences of these individuals' actions were profound. The will to possess art works may well have been part and parcel of the need for the middle classes to exhibit their cultural capital and differentiate themselves from lower and higher classes. But key tendencies within Romanticism, in particular the stress on novelty, also gave these groups

the inclination to buy up more and more works of art and embrace the exigencies of the market. Certainly, it was a key feature of the Edinburgh Art Union that, either through engravings or through purchases at exhibitions, members were given a variety of choices to own new works of art. When a new purchase or engraving was made, its novelty value was highly played. A perpetual cycle of artistic consumption was, consequently (and, perhaps, ironically) set in train.

Moreover, one of the outcomes of the commodification and romanticisation of the landscape idiom in the early nineteenth century was the proliferation of visual media which depicted nature or landscape. As well as illustrations in novels, engravings and photography, the “spectacle of nature” was widely disseminated through fine art books, travel and tourist literature, guide books, mementos, postcards, souvenirs, relics and stationery (Green, 1990). Landscape images were a recurrent feature of urban luxury commodities now being purchased by a visually hungry middle-class, itself partially freed from the restrictions on consumption and the taboos on free time.<sup>19</sup> The aestheticization of the landscape and the Highlands, of course, was a process with long historical roots, but from the 1840s the scope of the commodity was broader than ever. Queen Victoria’s Scottish excursions (which reached a peak with the purchase of Balmoral in 1848) accelerated the pageantry of tartanry and the cult of a non-threatening Jacobitism which has had lasting consequences on Scottish national identity. But a by-product must also have been the production of an internal middle-class public well-versed in the codes of landscape representation and the image in general. Hence from the mid-1830s, when the Scottish Academy had staged regular exhibitions in the capital, an appreciative, informed audience possessed of the correct faculties for approaching such images may well have been formed, in part, through this visual phantasmogoria of nature. In other words as Edinburgh’s gallery spaces were being sited in the 1840s and 50s, so an urban

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<sup>19</sup> Fraser indicates that in Scotland by the 1840s “among the bourgeoisie there appeared a much more systematic pursuit of leisure, as something quite separate from home and work. Once frowned upon as signs of the innate idleness of the labouring classes or of dissipation among the aristocracy, recreational activities began to attract middle-class attention as a rational, moral way of filling increased leisure time” (1990). The impact of the romantic ethic may well have been significant in this.

constituency of gallery-goers equipped with new modes of visual consumption was “sighted”, in the sense of being familiarized with a “purer” aesthetic and the visual.

The point, of course, should not be overstated. The primacy of the ocular and the ability to “appreciate” gallery art was also dependent on a whole set of other considerations (class distinction, art education, state expansion and the appearance of other visually orientated media in the lives of the urban middle classes such as libraries, theatres, sporting events, magazines, public parks, shops and so on). But to deny the salience of Romanticism and the landscape trope would be to deny a prime cultural force in the maturation of the art field in early nineteenth-century Scotland. The role of Romanticism was to act as a catalyst and a cultural legitimator whose presence galvanised the development of the market, legitimated the role of the artist and fed the thirst for certain types of visual images in the city. Its effect, when conjoined with the potent landscape idiom, was to sustain the momentum begun by civil society and the enlightenment towards cultural achievement. Landscape imagery was not merely the reflex of a contemporary obsession in the countryside but was part of the ideational complex that motivated cultural forms. Despite losing impetus from mid-century its initial drive was enough to keep the art world in motion. And in accordance with the role it played in other European countries, Romanticism - not necessarily the “revolutionary” Romanticism of England’s Shelley and Byron, nor the politically-motivated separatist movement of new nations, but the domesticated and therefore widespread movement of Scott and McCulloch - was to open up new possibilities for the development of art institutions in Edinburgh. It articulated with the movement towards autonomy to provide the Scottish Academy and its allies with valuable cultural support.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> This point can be concretized with a brief contrast between Germany and America. Romanticism in the former country emerged in the eighteenth century as an artistic, literary and philosophical movement with absolute impulses towards the artist’s need to succumb to interior feeling and the hermeneutic (Hauser, 1962). Apart from the security of the artist which this expression implied, one of the outcomes of the German Romantic movement was the building of galleries as spiritual temples to art. In America, on the other hand, for various economic, social and cultural reasons, Romanticism came in a weaker form and later, as did its art museums. The crucial dynamic of a vigorous bourgeois art field was absent in America, until middle-class power and taste were secured and literary Romanticism had begun to make inroads into the popular imagination. The irony, here, is that as Lehmann (1978) and Hook (1989) have indicated, this



**F: 1834-1847: the “Royal” Scottish Academy, Altercations Over Space and Further Conflicts in the Field**

From 1834 to 1847, in particular, romantic aspirations towards independence were heavily implicit in the Academy’s continuing struggles for cultural authority. On the grounds that art could only be furthered with the specialised knowledge of professional agents, and that artists lacked proper facilities befitting a British academy, the Scottish Academy petitioned the Board of Manufactures for public money, permanent exhibition space and the possibility of a Life Academy (a more relevant form of training in the “higher arts”). After all, declared the Academy, the Royal Institution received £500 per annum and yet possessed no “professional experience” (NG 1/73/13/1: 10). Furthermore, both the Royal Academy in London and the Royal Hibernian Academy received public funds, the latter a £300 annual grant. The Board’s reply to the Academy was tepid: access was granted to the Board’s “Statue Gallery” on four days a week and agreement to have the Royal Institution’s south octagon room for the annual exhibition was given, but no guarantees of official backing or any degree of permanence to these arrangements were made (NG1/73/13/2).

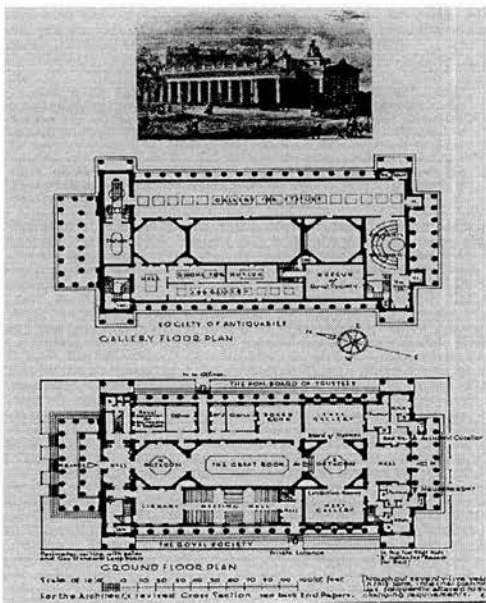


Figure 53: The Royal Institution Building, as extended by W. H. Playfair, 1832

form of Romanticism in America actually came to derive from the influence of Scottish Romanticism.

Despite being extended by sixty feet, space in Playfair's Royal Institution building was becoming increasingly scarce by the late 1830s. The rooms were used by the Royal Society, the Society of Antiquaries, as well as the Board of Manufactures, the Royal Institution and their respective collections. The Trustees Academy was also resident in the building, its head being chosen from the ranks of academicians. The acquisition of casts of part of the Elgin marbles from the British museum in 1837 (the Earl being an active member of the Board) and two hundred and fifty casts of Greek and Roman portrait busts from the Roman Fillipo Albacini (1777-1858) heightened tensions over space in the building.<sup>21</sup>



Figure 54: The Royal Institution Sculpture Gallery

Clearly, the ability to secure exhibition space in Edinburgh was a form of “cultural capital” by the late 1830s. Disharmony increasingly revolved around who had access and

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<sup>21</sup> The Albacini collection had been procured as alternative life-study material for pupils of the Trustees Academy and contributed to one of the most important European collections of casts of major antiquities and modern sculptural pieces (Smailes, 1991). Indeed, throughout the 1830s and 40s, the Board envisaged a “Gallery of National Importance” for which sculpture was to be a core component, although complaints were made in the *Edinburgh Literary Review* that public access was severely restricted. By 1836, however, the Board’s gallery of casts was opened to the public from 10am-4pm every day except Friday and indicated the growing responsibility of the Board as national gatekeeper of the fine arts.

control over dedicated art rooms. On the one hand, the Academy's position in the struggles over space was supported by the official apparatus of governance in London in the movement away from aristocratic control. In 1838 the Academy was finally successful in its application for a Royal Charter which fixed its constitution and laws. On the other hand, however, the Royal Institution and Board of Manufactures had residual hold over accommodation in the Royal Institution building and used their official standing in the field to make the Royal Scottish Academy's position uncertain.

In 1844, for instance, a picture by the son of Thomas Dick Lauder, secretary of the Board of Manufactures and the Royal Institution, was moved by the Academy council to a less salubrious position in the annual exhibition. This set in train a series of disputes over who had control of the building and command of the knowledge of hanging procedures. For the Academy defended their decision with respect to the "nature of the colouring throughout the picture, which seriously injured the effect of the exhibition at that place...its discordance with the surrounding pictures" (reprinted in *Monro*, 1846: 11); and thereby revealed their territories to be based upon art-knowledge. The Academy, in other words, claimed the right to exclude Board and Royal Institution members from access to their exhibition space before exhibition, in order to "purify" the art space and retain independence.<sup>22</sup> The Board on the other hand, claimed that the Academy had acted interestedly and that: "no public confidence can be placed in future in a council which can allow...the judgment of its Hanging Committee...to be swayed and overturned by every unworthy intrigue that may be originated by selfish individuals in the body which it ought to govern" (quoted in *Gordon*, 1976: 100). Sir Thomas Dick Lauder, in particular, argued that access to the galleries must be constant since the Board could not surrender control of the building to a "series of individuals changed every year, and of whose habits and even names they are ignorant!" (quoted in *Maxwell*, 1913: 239). As the Board's position in the field had been dislodged by an attempt to exclude them symbolically and

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<sup>22</sup> The defence of a "purer aesthetic" was fast becoming the Academy's *raison d'être*: they were defending a "disinterested view for the promotion of Art which are [sic] inwoven with its existence...and that an ardent devotion to the cause of Art on the part of the Academy, as a body, is the only effectual and permanent mode of securing the interests of the Artists themselves" (*Annual Report*, 1844: 8).

physically from the Academy's exhibitions, a show of strength was chosen by the Board's traditional members to reaffirm its status as landlord, official treasury for the fine arts and institutional gatekeeper. The Board's impulse towards conservation translated as an attack on the artist's impulse towards autonomy and modernity - "ungrateful rebels" who were changing the rules of art forever.<sup>23</sup>

The most controversial disagreement, however, was reached with the Board's final broadside at the Academy in the guise of an effective "notice to quit" from the galleries of the Royal Institution. For in 1845 the Board took custody of the Torrie collection of "ancient masters" from Edinburgh Town Council and vowed to place the collection on permanent display in the exhibition rooms at that time used by the Academy for the annual shows. This was to be exhibited *gratis* to the public at least two days a week, to become the nucleus, in the Board's view, "of a kind of national Gallery of paintings...which may be daily expected to increase without any expense to the public" (NG1/1/38:137). Ancient art, in other words, was being used as a symbolic resource by the Board and Royal Institution to displace the incursions of the modern artists and the increasing popularity of the Edinburgh Art Union. Lord Meadowbank's attack on modern art is caught, for instance, in the following:

This fact [the inflation of modern art] is proved by a circumstance altogether indisputable, that the Association for Promotion of the Fine Arts have year after year been reduced to the necessity of purchasing and distributing as prizes from these exhibitions many pictures which few would ever think of suspending upon their walls from their great inferiority...I submit it to be expedient because it has a direct tendency to increase the number of bad painters, and a depraved taste for Art among the people, which it has been the object of the government and the Board to prevent by the establishment of the School of Design and the Exhibition of Ancient Pictures (NG1/1/38: 186-196).

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<sup>23</sup> The RSA wrote an official memorial to the Treasury seeking guidance on their position in the building and expressed the need for permanent exhibition space for its growing collection and the possibility of a School of Art in order to follow through the intentions laid out in the new charter. Interestingly, the RSA argued that the present neo-classical building was more suited in style and refinement to the "fine arts" than to a "Board of Manufactures", and thereby reiterated the principles of a "pure space" of art in the capital (Gordon, 1976: 102). The Treasury, however, merely referred the memorial back to the Board of Manufactures for consideration, whose reception to the proposals was, of course, already negative.



The ensuing legal battle between artists and patrons over accommodation was compounded by a series of public disputes in the city's press and in the correspondence between the various institutions. From the artists' perspective, the very purpose of the building was to hold modern exhibitions, and that it was partly the success of these that provided the Royal Institution with the means to buy the old masters and to acquire a library. However, the way the affairs of the Board and the Royal Institution had been coordinated under the auspices of a small coterie of traditionalists had undermined the rights of the Academy. The appearance of separateness was indeed a useful device used by the Board and the Institution to use in official representations and in grant applications. "In reality" wrote David Scott, RSA, the Royal Institution was "a mere appendage of the Trustees; and in this transaction the one is so mixed up with the other, that each may be considered to represent the other" (Scott, 1845: 8). Nothing less than a thorough investigation of the accounts and minutes of the Royal Institution would reveal the injustices enacted on the artists, declared the Academy, who wrote to the Treasury and the Board of Manufactures to such an effect.

Precisely because of the Academy's growing influence amongst a widening art public, its interests were taken up by key institutions and individuals, including Edinburgh's Lord Provost, Henry Cockburn (Solicitor General), London's Art Union and influential newspapers such as the *Edinburgh Evening Post*. It was the Provost and Sheriff of Edinburgh, for instance, who modified the agreement under which the Torrie collection was to be displayed in order to allow the RSA requisite space during exhibition season.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, key members of the Board itself were gradually moving towards the Academy's position, and new appointments made to the Board by the Treasury included Academy members in key posts.<sup>25</sup> The public's general sympathy with the Academy was

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<sup>24</sup> Much to the chagrin of Lord Meadowbank who wrote personally to the Treasury to label the RSA "a body which from its conduct towards the Board and its public abuse of it proceedings did not appear to be entitled to any particular consideration" (NG1/1/28: 186).

<sup>25</sup> The Board was clearly no longer a Board of *Manufactures* comprised of an eighteenth-century improving aristocracy, but a Board of *fine arts* whose membership had widened to accommodate shifts in Scotland's social stratification and fine art field as a whole. The organization had given up its annual exposition of manufactured goods, for instance, but was still charged by some as an "amateur guardian" with a "superficial" interest in fine art in contrast to

clearly evident in the series of articles and letters that appealed for public support and defended the artists against the “eviction order” served to them in 1845. Sheriff Monro’s summaries of the conflict were in fact so popular that a collection of the essays, with appended documents, was published in Edinburgh in 1846.

More symbolic power accrued to the Academy with the results of the accountant’s report into the whereabouts of the profits of the Royal Institution’s modern exhibitions. Concrete documentation had been supplied by the RSA to show how the Royal Institution had creamed off profits from these shows in order to build up their own library and collection of old masters. The Institution’s response to this was to publicly charge the artists with wilful and deliberate falsehood. Now they had to retract this charge and the imputations made against the President and the Council, and accepted inconsistencies in their handling of the profits, of which £2,363 had been unaccounted for. The violations of the Royal Institution were now publicly aired, placing the Board itself in a very precarious position. By this time, news of the growing conflicts north of the border had reached state offices in London, whose response to the growing mess was the ordering of an official inquiry into the positions, histories and claims of Edinburgh’s various art institutions and the search for a solution.

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the Academy’s professional knowledge (Monro, 1846: 52). As one RSA statement read: “Thus the Board has brought itself into direct rivalry with the Academy; and the question, so momentous for Art and Artists, is at once raised,- whether the body of Scottish Artists are, as in other professions, to have the superintendence of the education connected with its own proper department, or whether that is to be entrusted to non-professional hands. The importance of Art to the successful prosecution of manufactures is cordially admitted; but this does not weaken the observation that the objects of the Board have assumed a character not warranted by the legitimate bearing of the Fine Arts upon its own specific purposes” (RSA statement, reprinted in Monro, 1846, appendix: 42).

## **G: The British State and Edinburgh's Art Field**

“The practical result of the circumstances which I have brought under your Lordships’ notice, with respect to the Royal Academy, is, that Edinburgh presents to us the remarkable phenomenon of an existing Royal Academy of Fine Arts, chartered by the Crown, which has not the opportunity of carrying on an exhibition of Modern Art, and which is practically excluded from all share in instruction in that important branch of knowledge” (Sir John Shaw Lefevre, Government Report, 1847).

The state’s intervention in art matters in Scotland represents a distinct phase in the history of the field. Despite stronger state involvement in social policy (the poor laws, school inspectors for instance), Westminster, on the whole, appeared remote from Scottish affairs in the early nineteenth century (Paterson, 1994). The real controllers of Scotland were figures such as the Lord Advocate, lawyers, professionals and aristocrats. Social legislation was very often administered through supervisory boards, or local and national committees in a system of trusteeship. After all the British state was too preoccupied with matters of Empire to get too involved in the daily running of the territory north of the border; and there was little threat of nationalist uprisings, for Scotland’s “dual national consciousness” (both British and Scottish) contrasted markedly with separatist nationalism elsewhere (Nairn, 1974). London, then, intervened only when invited to do so by Scottish factions. The tendency was for local M.Ps to deal with Scottish affairs outside Parliament and then to notify the full house for formal ratification. As Paterson summarizes: “Thus the Scots functioned as an informal domestic Parliament within the imperial legislature” (Paterson, 1994: 49). Indeed it may well have been the case that Scotland possessed its own quasi-state, for all the key elements of an official rule-making system were in place. Domestic governing structures resided in the burghs, counties and civic institutions.

If Scotland did not possess a formal state, then, it was still able to operate within an enabling framework that gave it similar powers. Scottish professionals, on the one hand, were sceptical of unwieldy state bureaucracy, but on the other perfectly willing and effective players in civic and national life. Their governing institutions, moreover, were those that developed out of the powerful configuration of civil society, sometimes transposed into a philanthropic key resonant with ideas of individual responsibility, social

welfarism, voluntarism and localism. Influential Victorian moralists saw the duty of a strong middle-class to protect the “weak”. The state, in other words, should only provide the institutions through which the philanthropic venture could be consolidated. The Evangelical Thomas Chalmers, in this connection, espoused a kind of *laissez faire* principle of welfarism that seemed to develop aspects of civil society, science and Protestantism, with a desire to upgrade the sentiments of the lower classes (Smith, 1983).<sup>26</sup>

What is clear is that the building of a Scottish infrastructure depended on a permissive framework that, while borrowing from English models and examples, retained a distinct profile and local complexion. In this respect, sub-statist groups moulded older facets of civil society in order to offer provisions which they felt the state would have a duty to offer. Such rational self-government pulled in Enlightenment reason and civil society to construct a modern, local version of national community:

The governing institutions were part of civil society and were often informal: as was common throughout the highly decentralised British state, they were the creation of localities rather than impositions from the centre (Paterson, 1994: 71).

But how far is this true with regard to Scotland’s art field? Well, the situation of Edinburgh’s art world seemed to reflect the mixture of autonomy, tentative supervision and indifference <sup>towards</sup> the state that characterised nineteenth century Scottish civil society as a whole. State-art relations in Scotland can be approached, therefore, as a more acute

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<sup>26</sup> Chalmers’ desire was for a kind of local ethical state that promoted improvement and the diffusion of useful knowledge based in Protestantism and science. Modes of civility centred on domestic life could be used to promote a kind of “popular enlightenment” that would be secured through the beneficial effects of libraries, museums and parks, instead of the alehouse or gambling den. Indeed Gramsci’s description of the ethical state appears to fit quite closely with the tenor of middle-class welfarism in Scotland from mid-century - the inculcation of bourgeois norms and thereby the temperance of radicalism and potential insurgence. Only the broad principle of self-reliance permeated Edinburgh’s art institutions, however, for social welfarism and the philanthropic venture found outlets in Thomas Dick’s “mechanics institutes”, George Millar’s writings and Chalmers’ evangelical programmes of moral improvement (Smith, 1983). Like England, systematic programmes of reform in Scotland gained momentum by the latter nineteenth century: for now, it was imperative for the middle-class cultural elite to create an artistic space between patrician abundance and popular vulgarity that marked this group as refined, modern and distinct.



version of autonomy to that pertaining in England. The conflicts that fractured the art field in the early nineteenth century were conflicts internal to Edinburgh, between official patrons with a conventional idea of artistic provision and modern artists seeking the establishment of a more innovative game of *fine art*. Hence, there were duller and less frequent forms of official intervention than elsewhere, and state directives were very often mediated by local personnel. While the Board of Manufactures was ultimately responsible to the Treasury, it operated with a high degree of autonomy and local power, particularly from its inception in 1727 until the 1830s. It was often successful in resisting attempts at government deregulation and interference, defending its right to distribute funds in a way befitting the station of its members. Indeed, communication was often so poor between the state and the Board that the latter had to rely on their own members, who happened to be M.P.s (such as Lord Melville and the Duke of Buccleuch) to gain crucial information on policies that directly effected the Board itself (as was the case in 1847 with the first news of the “Herring Fishery Bill”). The Board was, in fact, very rarely mentioned in Parliament, but left to its own devices, with legislation so loose in direction that it allowed a great deal of interpretation at the Scottish end (as was the case with the Board of Supervision).

Similarly, for the period up to the late 1840s, Edinburgh’s other art institutions enjoyed a degree of institutional freedom from the British state that was rare elsewhere. The Royal Institution may have received its £500 from the Treasury, via the Board of Manufactures, but to all intents and purposes operated as a private members institution. At the same time, the Academy’s affairs were little known in Parliament up to the 1840s - a situation that was both expedient and an annoyance to the Academy. The Academy’s affairs could be misrepresented by the Board and the Royal Institution who both had more official leverage; however, the move towards autonomy as a whole by the Academy was based on the pretext that official bodies such as the state would trust art to the professional nurturing of the artists themselves. Complaints about English indifference coexisted, then, with contentment for independence.

On the whole, however, in matters of art, as in other matters, governments awake when local, private issues threaten to billow into public domains, accelerated in this case

by the widening of art to a broader audience (where, as Fyfe (1993) recognises, radical solutions may have been promoted behind the backs of the state). By the 1840s, then, there *was* a development of state intervention that reached a high with the government enquiry into the affairs of Edinburgh's key institutions in 1847, as the altercations between Edinburgh's institutions threatened to spill over into the visible domains of civic and national life. Intervention, then, can be read as state pragmatism in the face of internal conflict north of the border and one suspects that the government would have reacted further if the situation had called for it, just as it would have in civil society in general if Scotland had threatened with revolt or nationalist insurgence. In the background was the state's growing desire to police the boundaries of culture under the auspices of rationalisation, democratisation and the construction of a national state-arts apparatus, which reached a climax in 1851 with the Great Exhibition and the South Kensington complex of museums, schools and collections (Fyfe, 1993; Pearson, 1982; Minihan, 1977; Corrigan and Sayer, 1985).

As it stood, the report into the affairs of Edinburgh's art field by the secretary of the Board of Trade, Sir John Shaw Lefevre, was extensive and far-reaching. The Academy was to label the report "one of the most important documents which have ever come under the Scottish Academy, and may be said to constitute an era in the history of Scottish Art." (Committee Annual Report, 1847: 9). Indeed it was the Academy which came out of the report the best. £10,000 was to be ear-marked out of the Board's funds to be given to the RSA for them to build their own galleries. The RSA was to have its own life academy, for its own pupils, and given a brief to teach those of the Trustees Academy. The separation between "design" and "fine art" was sanctioned by the state in the recommendation that the RSA's life class was to stick to painting and drawing from the model, whereas the Trustees Academy was to concentrate on craft, the antique and commercial design. In the meantime, until the building had been erected, the RSA was to have use of the galleries in the Royal Institution building for its exhibitions and teaching. The RSA was recognized as a "body of importance" in Edinburgh, with two of the inquiry's comments reading:

Ist. The giving to the RSA, which must be considered as the representative of the artists of Scotland, its due position in reference to the promotion and teaching of the Fine Arts...4th. The restoration of harmony and good feeling between the Scotch Royal Academy, comprising the principal professors of Art, and the Board of Trustees and Royal Institution, comprising the principal promoters and admirers of the Fine Arts in Scotland (Government Report, 1847: 12-13).<sup>27</sup>

In effect, the inquiry executed the *coup de grace* on the Royal Institution, taking away its grant and declaring its private collection to be national and public. For a time the Treasury and M.Ps had been writing to the Royal Institution with requests to “democratise” conditions of access to its collection and provide cheaper catalogues.<sup>28</sup> Now, all of its power was devolved to the Board of Manufactures, and its collection of old masters given to the Scottish nation to comprise part of a new National Gallery of Scotland collection. This was to be permanently displayed in the Royal Institution

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<sup>27</sup> As for the Edinburgh Art Union, the use of the lottery as a means of organizing the distribution of pictures had come under question by the mid 1830s, to the extent that Westminster sought clarification of the constitution, composition and history of the Association with the House of Commons Select Committees of 1835-36. The Association defended itself as a utilitarian body which diffused a taste for art among the “masses” and played up its role in cultivating and refining manners in Scotland. Now, however, the Association was threatened with illegality on the basis that lotteries were immoral and encouraged gambling. These charges resulted in the Select Committee of 1844-45, whose purpose it was to consider the position of Art Unions generally. The Edinburgh Art Union was called to London to defend itself in a question and answer session. J. A. Bell, secretary of the Union, defended the practice of awarding prizes - not money prizes for the winner to spend, but the allocation of a work of art chosen by the committee from the Academy exhibitions. The Association also answered charges of exclusivity and defended buying “high art” as opposed to utility arts or design arts. Finally, the Select Committee asked the Union whether, if a National Gallery was built in Edinburgh, it would present every year a painting from the Scottish School. Bell answered in the affirmative and in 1849 the Association purchased Lauder’s *Christ Teacheth Humility* for the national collection. A Bill was duly passed in 1845 which made Art Unions, including the Edinburgh Art Union, permanent and legal, the Association was left to its own devices after the granting of a Royal Charter in 1846-47 and continued to promote the market, bourgeois patronage and modern art in the city.

<sup>28</sup> Hence Joseph Hume, M.P. for Edinburgh suggested “that as the public taste may in some degree be formed by the perusal of such pictures, and an impulse thereby be given to the fine arts, or amusement offered to the community [it was requested that] the secretary will submit to the Trustees of the exhibitions, whether they will be pleased to admit the public gratis to see these pictures on two days of the week, if not for the whole 6 days, stating also that the public are admitted gratis to Hampton Palace, the National Gallery and many other public collections of paintings” (NG3/1/1:408). In response, in 1846, the Institution opened its collection to the public, free, on two days a week and to the artists on three days a week.

building until such a time when the RSA had been rehoused in their new building. As the inquiry stated:

In consequence of the establishment of a National Gallery, my Lords assume from the correspondence that has taken place upon the subject, that the objects of this, at the time it was established, most valuable institution - forming, as it has done, the real foundation of the National Gallery - having been otherwise provided for, neither the rooms occupied, nor the grant received by them, will be any longer be required (Government Report, 1847: 551-2).

In curtailing the privileges of an outmoded aristocracy, the state reinserted the objects of a history of private patronage into the public domain as “national art”. Slowly, the Institution’s accounts were wound up and their powers dissolved, despite symbolic resistance from Lord Meadowbank and some final spectacular purchases: Veronese’s *Last Supper*, and *Mars and Venus* and Zurbaran’s *Immaculate Conception*. Their erstwhile partner-institution the Board of Manufactures ignored a last minute plea to retain the £500 grant, and articulated the need for economic rationalization in relation to its new duties to look after the National Gallery. The Board thereby requested that all ties and accounts between the two institutions be cut.

As for the Board of Manufactures itself, the social composition of its membership and its brief had been slowly re-shaped in favour of closer alliance with the RSA. By 1850, D.O. Hill, Lord Cockburn, John Watson Gordon and John Steel, all RSA members, had been appointed to the Board, which no longer comprised of upper and middling aristocracy (Lord, Dukes, Earls), but of the baronetcy, professionals and financiers. Indeed, the Treasury had written to the Board asking it to appoint artists to its membership in order to include an “artistic element” within the Board’s affairs (NG1/73/23/11).<sup>29</sup> Still, the dual-purpose that had always characterised the Board (the

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<sup>29</sup> The substance of this letter is missing but the description reads: “John Shaw Lefevre Esq. expressing his opinion in regard to certain portions of his Report, esp. on the introduction of an ‘Artistic element’ by appointing three artists to be commissioners of the Board”. Clearly the Board were cautious of this move, and a follow up letter from Lefevre replies to the Board’s resistance to this proposal, by saying that an “artistic element” was prevalent at Somerset House that would be “of great utility to the School of Design in Edinburgh, both in respect of Fine Art and of ornament:- and I anticipate various ulterior advantages in reference to the Fine Arts in Scotland” (NG1/73/23/12).



promotion of fine arts and commercial design) was intact inasmuch as the Trustees' Academy continued to instruct in "practical skill", "industrial design" and the principles of "decorative and ornamental art" (Government Report, 1847: 10). For the time being the state was content to sanction this dual-role, although by 1858 the autonomy of the Trustees' Academy was further dissolved when it was affiliated with the Department of Science and Art in London as a government school of design. The Board was henceforth entrusted with the foundation and development of the National Gallery of Scotland, its status flattened to guardian of a collection forged in the struggles between various institutions over which it adjudicated.

Eventually, Lefevre's proposals were applied, but with some notable modifications. For the purposes of rationalisation, the building was to be shared between the Academy and the National Gallery collection, as it was for a time at Trafalgar Square and indeed at the Louvre. William Henry Playfair was to build the edifice in neo-classical style on the Mound, to the south of the Royal Institution building, from 1850, with funds provided by the Board, but also a £30,000 government grant. Despite being voted down on grounds of expense, Parliament eventually ratified the foundation of the gallery, to provide "opportunities, which cannot be over-estimated, of rational amusement, mental cultivation, and refinement of taste" (Government Report, 1847: 15).

For a while the RSA was still cautious of its position, having been promised its own dedicated building; but all fears were laid to rest on assurances from the Lord Provost and the Treasury as to the Academy's importance in education as well as in "improving taste". Furthermore, no rent was to be charged to the Academy and the curator of the National Gallery was to be chosen from a short-list of Academy members, "for the beneficial and harmonious working of the National Gallery, and for securing the confidence of the public" (NG1/1/41: 327). All of which, in effect, delivered a kind of art world monopoly to the Academy.

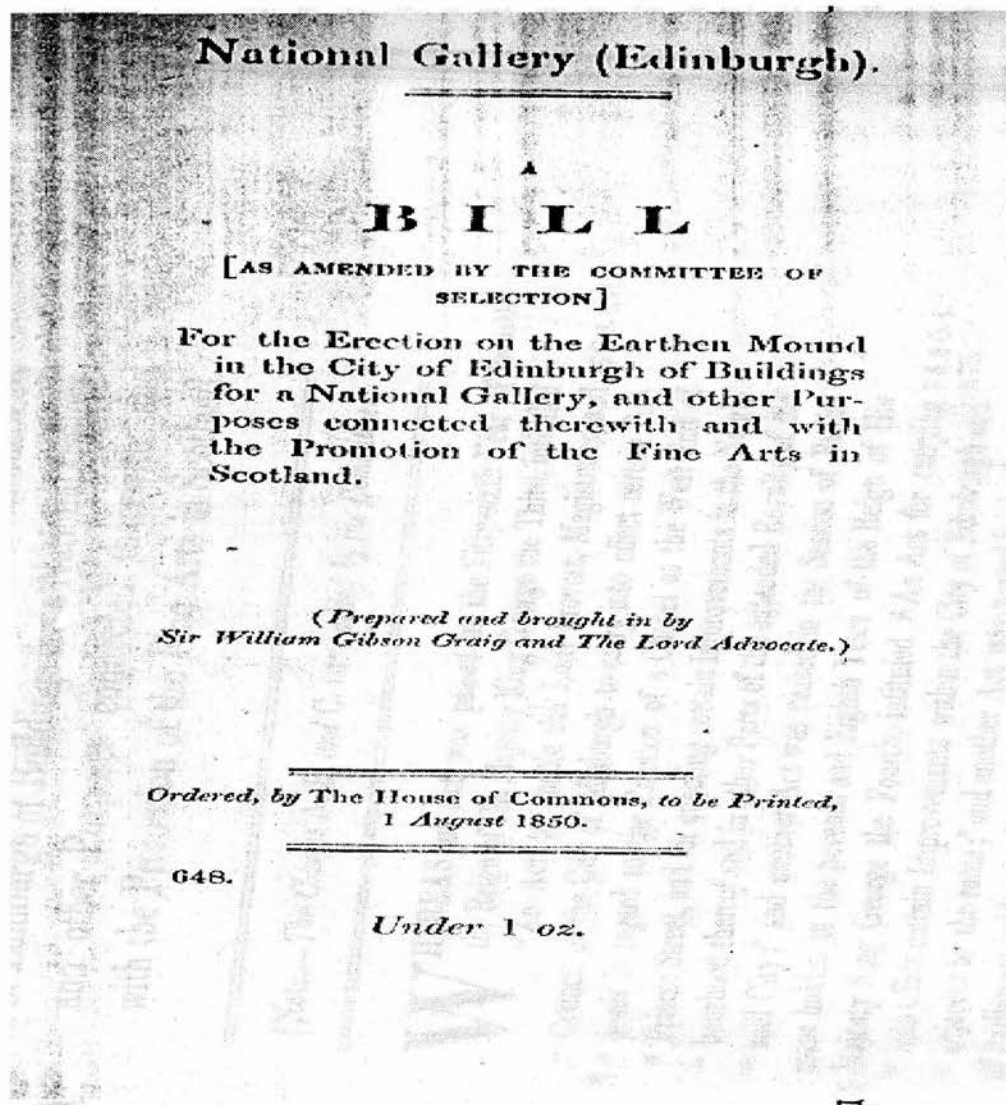


Figure 55: Cover page of Government Bill for National Gallery of Scotland, 1850

## H: Conclusion

The National Gallery of Scotland was founded on the fissured terrain that was Scottish and British social and cultural history. Its presence threw into relief centuries of poverty, uncertainty and conflict - a symbol of civic and national well-being, bourgeois confidence and state guidance. It grew on the fertile cultural soil of civil society, later reconfigured in the context of Victorian self-reliance, romanticism and class conflict. It was the summation of pointed struggles for recognition amongst a modern group of artists, whose claims to space, coupled with a desire for autonomy, placed an incendiary in the field. Such struggles between the “ancients and the moderns” mirrored those of

elsewhere, and in this sense the broad cultural game was recognisable (in England, the split in the Society of Artists between inner elite and ordinary members, for instance, and in Ireland a divergence between the Dublin Society, comprised of aristocratic patrons, and the Royal Irish Academy, who were artists striving for artistic authority).<sup>30</sup> As Bourdieu notes in "The Market for Symbolic Goods" (1993), the enduring friction between artists/intellectuals and aristocrats/patrons over legitimacy is one correlative with the growing complexity of the field and therefore with the growth of consumers, agencies and other modern art institutions.<sup>31</sup> To this extent, the conflict in Edinburgh's art field matched those of complex fields elsewhere.

If the fact of struggle was universal, however, the details were distinct, local and Scottish, and some of them I hope to have revealed. The National Gallery of Scotland was both a concession to the Scottish art field (mainly the RSA) and a solution to the conflicts which had dogged it for the last half century. To an extent, the gallery was less a centralised, state-run organisation of the continental type, a space of republican or nationalist victory, and more of a fragmented hotch-potch of influences with a Trustee-based management. If "national" is understood in its limited meaning of relating to a state, then the gallery was "non-national". However, that the relevant institutions saw themselves as progenitors of both civic and national ideals speaks of the currency of eighteenth century ideals of civil society - of provincial government, national improvement and (semi) autonomous cultural organization.

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<sup>30</sup> Similarities between the Irish and Scottish cases were noted by Monro in 1846, who cited "N.M.", in an article titled "Irish Artists", from the *New Monthly Magazine*, in 1823. The author, in vitriolic tones, claimed that: "painters and connoisseurs mutually distrust each other...so that the project of an amicable, not to say advantageous connexion, between an academy of art and a committee of gentlemen, appears altogether Utopian and impracticable...why should we - how can we, with taste, propriety, or judgment, expect, that a Council of R.As shall patiently or profitably submit to be 'protected' by a junta of private gentlemen?" (1846: 109).

<sup>31</sup> That is, "with the constitution of an ever-growing, ever more diversified corps of producers and merchants of symbolic goods, who tend to reject all constraints apart from technical imperatives and credentials" (1993: 112). All this points to a fresh definition of art and the function of the artist in Europe from the classical age, but which is, paradoxically, guaranteed by the "development of an impersonal market", and the artist's "submission to the laws of the market of symbolic goods" (1983: 114).

The collection itself reflected this: not based on a state purchase (like, eventually, the National Gallery in London) but made up of the Torrie Collection, the Royal Institution's collection of ancient masters, pictures acquired by the Edinburgh Art Union, Academy pictures and the casts and pictures owned by the Board itself. The building contained two parallel sets of rooms, five in each set. The western rooms were dedicated to the permanent exhibition of the collection of national pictures, the five eastern rooms devoted for the use of the Academy. The continued distance of the British state was not only evident in the fact that it provided only a portion of the public funds for the building, but also clear from the debates which preceded the final decision to start work on the gallery. Hence in the House of Commons, in 1850, M.P.s voiced opposition to the building on the grounds that: "There could be no justice in giving to the city of Edinburgh the sum of £25,000 for an object in which the rest of the country had no interest"; and that "far greater claims for the vote of this nature" were had by Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds and Birmingham" (Parliamentary Papers: 1850, vol. 113).

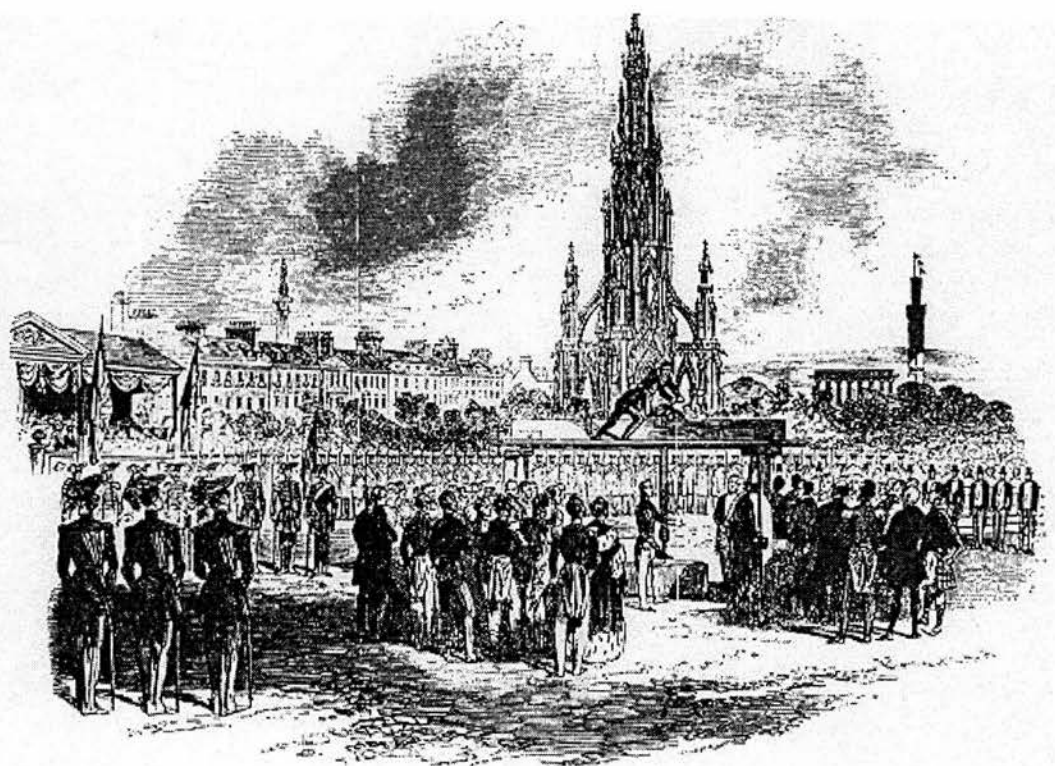


Figure 56: Prince Albert Laying the Foundation Stone of the National Gallery of Scotland, 1850



The gallery's foundation stone was laid in August 1850 by Prince Albert to an elaborate civic-national ceremony (over-elaborate as far as the Treasury was concerned, for the Board was chastised for over-spending). A bottle was buried at the site, into which were put mementos from the relevant institutions. So very aptly squeezed together in a fragile space were placed objects from the RSA, the Royal Institution, the Board of Trustees, the Lord Provost of Edinburgh and the Edinburgh Art Union. Prince Albert's speech praised the "rigour" and "independence" of industry, and reinforced the practical advantages of extending the scope of the "younger and weaker sisters the Fine Arts" to a broader population and the improvement of the British nation as a whole (NG1/1/39: 212).<sup>32</sup> That such rhetorics of nationhood and universal access veiled the gallery's status as symbolic capital - a cultural space that served to elevate the "pure", "high" and "refined" and abjured the "low" and "vulgar" - forms the basis to the final chapter. This follows a brief description of the building of the National Gallery itself.

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<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile, the idea of a national gallery had attracted several bequests and gifts, including Gainsborough's full-length of *The Hon. Mrs. Graham*, Tiepolo's *Finding of Moses* and Terbrugghen's *Beheading of St. John*. The Academy itself was making some high-profile purchases, including Bassano's *Adoration of the Kings*, bought for £600 in 1856, although its most notable collection was formed through the assemblage of modern diploma pictures (Thompson, 1972).

## PLAYFAIR, EDINBURGH, AND THE NATIONAL GALLERY BUILDING

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Before entering a more critical analysis of the National Gallery building and its contents in relation to space and power, it may be useful to provide some general social history on the actual building of the National Gallery of Scotland and the social milieu of its architect, William Henry Playfair. The present chapter, therefore, provides some light historical background notes on the architectural development of the Mound in Edinburgh and takes a look at the mutation of the gallery and the stylistic indices that informed it.

### A: Playfair's Classical Edinburgh

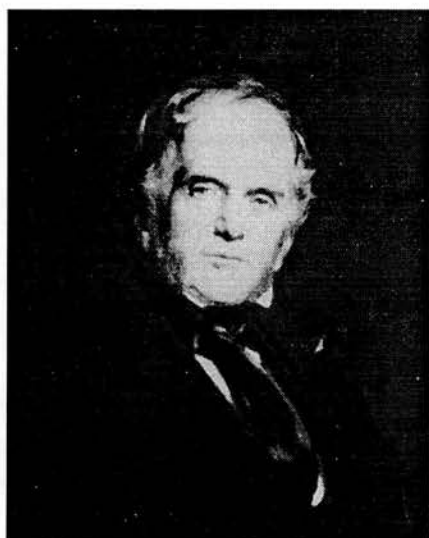


Figure 57: *William Henry Playfair*  
(detail), Sir John Watson Gordon

William Henry Playfair was Enlightened Edinburgh's classical architect elect and, according to Youngson, "in terms of the amount of building which he planned and supervised, Edinburgh owes more to Playfair than to any other architect" (1966: 292). At the very least Playfair was one of the three architects who did most to shape the city in its modern guise; the others being James Craig and Robert Adam. Born in London in 1789, the son of a Scots architect, Playfair spent his early years in Edinburgh with his

academic uncle, John Playfair, only to return to London to train in 1816. He paid a brief visit to France and returned to Scotland later that year, studying under the Glasgow architect William Stark. Stark had established himself as one of Scotland's leading architects of the picturesque tradition. His plans for the development of the area between Leith and Edinburgh, in 1813, borrowed from the principles that had been pulled out of the seventeenth century landscape pictures of Claude and Poussin: starting with the natural contours of the scene, then blending in the architectural site adding trees or shrubs as necessary. On his death, Playfair took over this project. Stark also designed the Hunterian Museum in Glasgow in 1803-04, departing from Hunter's original plans but using a simple and restrained classical order with "hexastyle" portico and compact dome (Markus, 1989).

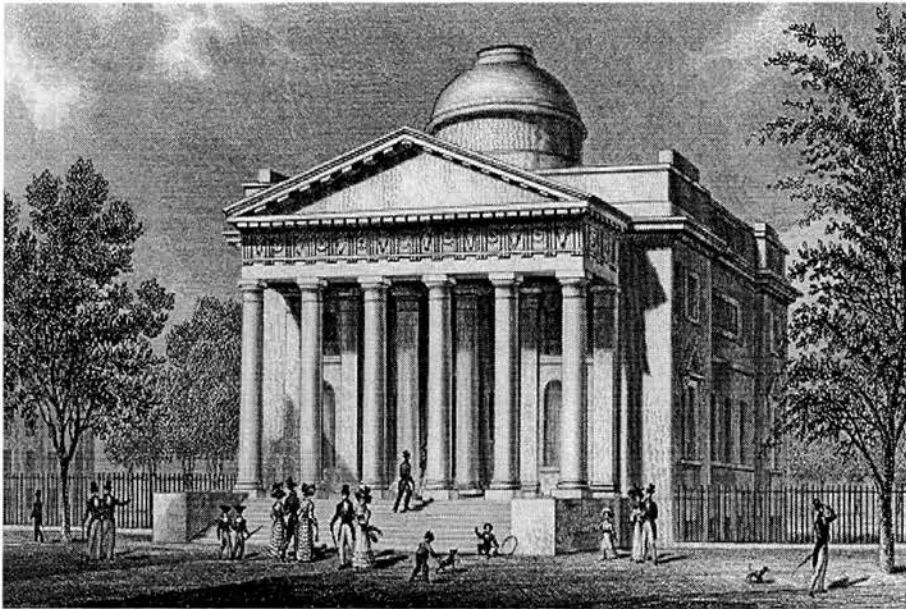


Figure 58: The Hunterian Museum, Glasgow

Stark's influence on Playfair was a factor in the latter's attitude to commissions as well as their style. Playfair was more inclined to accept work on non-commercial, public buildings which could neatly complement rather than disrupt a pre-existing natural setting. His co-ordination of the ill-fated national monument, for instance, with the leading English authority on Greek architecture, C. R. Cockerell, stemmed from an interest in maintaining the physical character of Calton Hill. The idea for a monument to celebrate Scotland's Imperial involvement in the Peninsular War against France was put

to a committee of Scotland's most powerful gentlemen (the Dukes of Atholl and Montrose, the Earl of Roseberry, William Dundas M.P. and Lord Melville among them) and to a sub-committee of its most notable professionals including Scott, Cockburn and Jeffrey. Discussion revolved around the siting and style of the monument but support was strongly voiced for a Greek structure in the form of the Temple of Minerva. In a letter to *The Times* in April 1817 on the subject, a commentator espoused the Parthenon as the "purest model of a public building which ever came from the hands of man" (NLS MS 638). The national and military basis to its history was also recognised; the temple was a symbol of victory in arms, of Hercules and Theseus' triumphs over "barbarous nations".

Similarly, a letter addressed to the Lord Advocate in the *Scots Magazine* of February 1820 spoke of the Greek monument to "national honour", "military triumphs", "civil liberty", "domestic security and peace" as one which represented Edinburgh's progress from the "rudeness" of the Old Town to the refinements of the New Town (NLS MS 638). Put another way, the Parthenon represented the putative advance of Scotland's "manners", and hence was a "national" undertaking. But its role was also found in the wider context of the Union and empire generally. The monument was labelled a symbol of Imperial glories against the French and "a splendid addition to the architectural riches of the empire, in which all its [Scotland's] inhabitants are interested" (NLS MS 638). On the laying of the foundation stone, attended by the likes of Lord Lynedoch, the Duke of Buccleuch and Lord Elgin, both "Flowers of Edinburgh" and "Rule Britannia" were played, signifying the national and socio-political interstices at which the proposed edifice found itself. Indeed, in keeping with its fragmented role, the national monument was never completed. The project relied on unofficial and private subscriptions and ran into financial difficulties in the late 1820s, signalling, for many, the end of Edinburgh's "Golden Age". Playfair wrote to Cockerell ruefully on the 30th June 1829: "Our Parthenon has come to a dead halt and is, I am afraid likely to stand up a striking proof of the pride and poverty of us Scots...what is to be done next I know not. I suppose, Nothing!" (NLS MS 638).



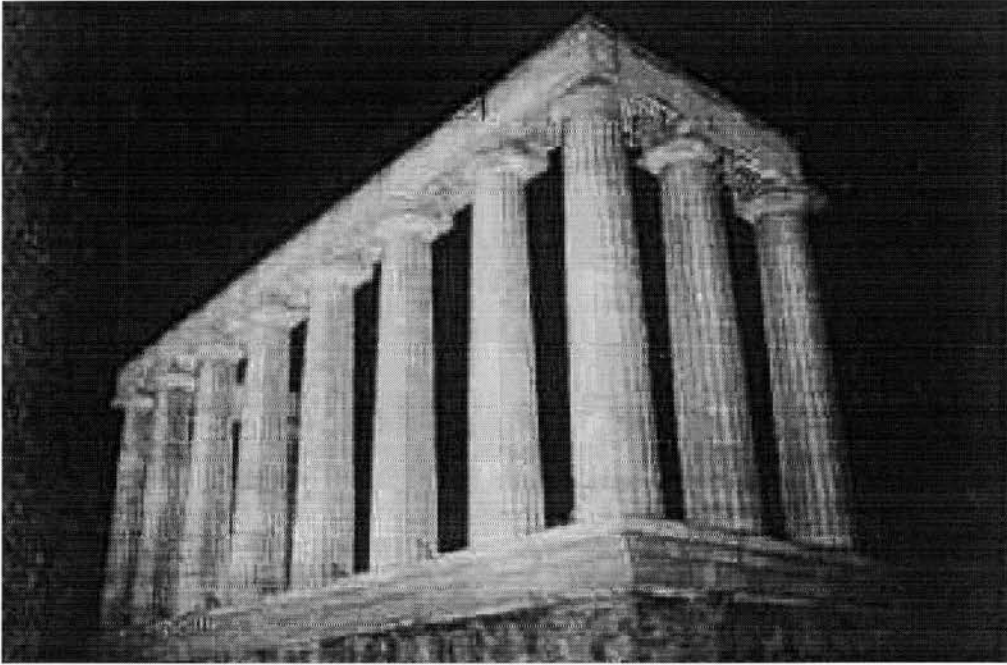


Figure 59: The National Monument, Calton Hill, William Henry Playfair

But this did not scupper the building of classical edifices in the city, and Playfair continued to carry out commissions in this idiom. His other schemes included the completion of the University, begun by Robert Adam but delayed for financial reasons; the Playfair library, completed around 1827, and lauded as one of the most elegant and refined examples of late classical architecture in Britain (Youngson, 1966: 200); and Surgeon's Hall of 1830-33, using a similar "hexastyle" portico to Stark's Hunterian with a row of front Ionic columns supporting an ornamented pediment. Playfair also designed country houses. He worked for Lord Lynedoch on a lodge and bridge "looking among the heavy rocks, like a rainbow across the water" (NLS, Letter, August 1841); on Floors Castle from 1838-49 for the Duke and Duchess of Roxburghe "who treat me as if I were old Inigo [Jones] come to life again" (NLS, Letter, April, 1841); and Brownlow House, which Playfair reckoned would accrue character with "old weather stains and vegetable incrustations" but which already stood out "charmingly in the midst of smooth velvet turf, skilfully sprinkled with flowers and shrubs and surrounded by magnificent trees" (NLS, Letter, September 1841).

These descriptions, and especially the reference to Inigo Jones, indicates the extent to which Playfair was steeped in Palladianism and the Picturesque. Like Stark,

Playfair was known to look to the old master landscapists for the right balance between the rugged and the smooth that the likes of Gilpin and Price had grappled with in their respective essays on this dimension of nature. Donaldson's Hospital (one of Playfair's non-classical constructions built outside of Edinburgh in the 1840s) can certainly be understood as an essay in variety. The palatial turrets, enfiladed rooms, castellated decoration and domed tops harked back, for Playfair, to the sixteenth and seventeenth century English style of Jones, expressing the "pure language" of the picturesque, rather than the "grotesque and unhealthy jumble" that resulted from the mix of Gothic and Roman. The building is all the more remarkable given the stringency of Playfair's other buildings, although its overt Palladianism also reflects the extent to which this style had become commensurate with Whig ideals at large (Jeffrey, 1991). Playfair further played down the flamboyance of Donaldson's and retained a strong dislike for architectural schemes that were tawdry from his "pure", professionalised view. In a castigation of his rival William Burn, who designed country houses but who also vied for the National Monument commission, Playfair wrote:

Burn meantime carries every thing before him, generally however creating horrid blots in the landscape, wherever he is employed - and is again becoming more purse proud and ostentatious and overbiasing than ever. His utter want of genius is only to be equalled by his copious supply of impudence (NLS, Letter, April, 1841).

### **B: Playfair on the Mound**

Next, we come to the area of Edinburgh that Playfair came to see as his own personal architectural space - the Mound. As Gow has intimated, the apparent logic of the arrangements pertaining to the Mound today belie what was a very complex, and often overlooked, historical development (Gow, 1990). Irrespective of the "man-made" nature of the Mound itself, formed from the soil extracted from the basements of New Town dwellings, the buildings which adorn the site speak of a most interesting set of technical, political and cultural considerations and conflicts, many of which have been alluded to previously.

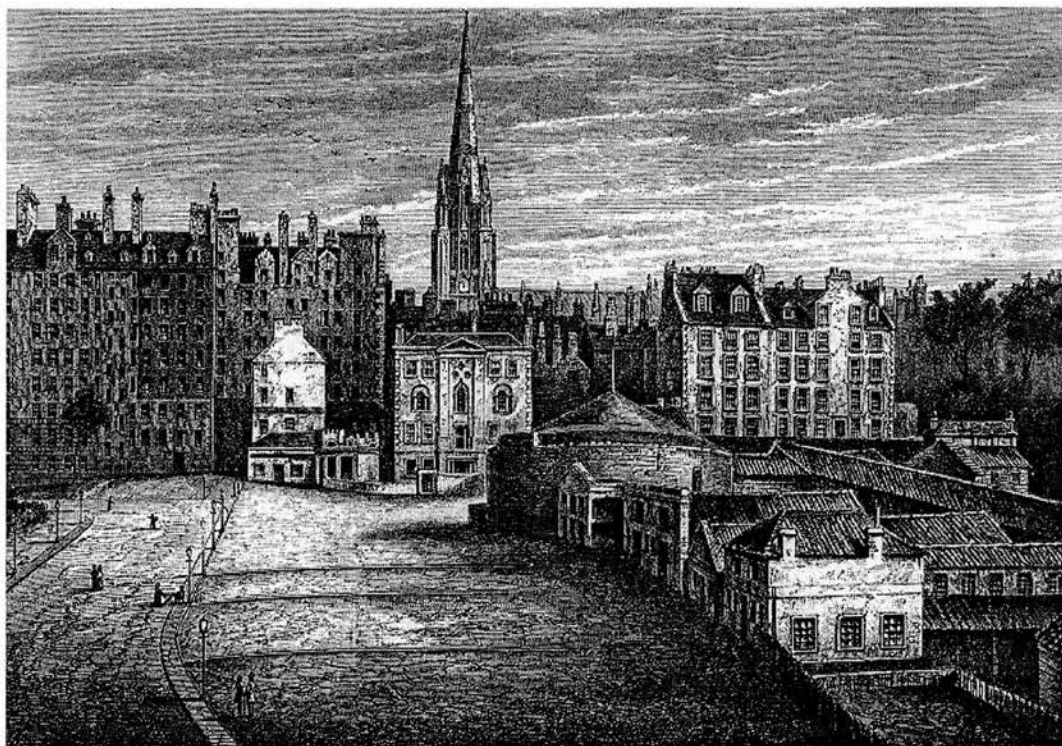


Figure 60: View of Old Town from the head of the Mound before the building of the Free Church, the Royal Institution and other buildings

From the 1820s the Mound was a resonant spatial locus for civic debate, with various plans suggested for its development. As the transition zone between the Old and New Towns, any Mound project would represent the visible attitude of the city's leaders to its two regions and to the city's future generally. One suggested plan was to match the development of the increasingly commercial Princes Street with a seven hundred and fifty foot complementary arcade in the French style. This was Trotter of Dreghorn's "A Plan of Communication between the New and Old Town of Edinburgh", of 1829, which visualised a metropolitan ensemble of shops, warehouses and markets, fronted on a grand scale in neo-classical style. This proposal, however, was rejected on the grounds of expense. Playfair's alternative scheme of 1831, including pleasure grounds and a road skirted by various buildings, was rejected on similar grounds. Clearly, though, this area had been primed for a form of "gentrification" that reflected social interests to its north rather than its south - a point I will return to in the next chapter.

Playfair's endeavours on the Mound received a boost in 1822 when he was asked to erect the building to house the Board of Manufactures and other organisations of

intellectual and artistic pretension. Playfair's design for the Royal Institution was a pure classical building in the Doric order, but which was short in length and lacked ornament. As a result the institution appeared "square, heavy-looking and ill proportioned" (Youngson, 1966: 164).

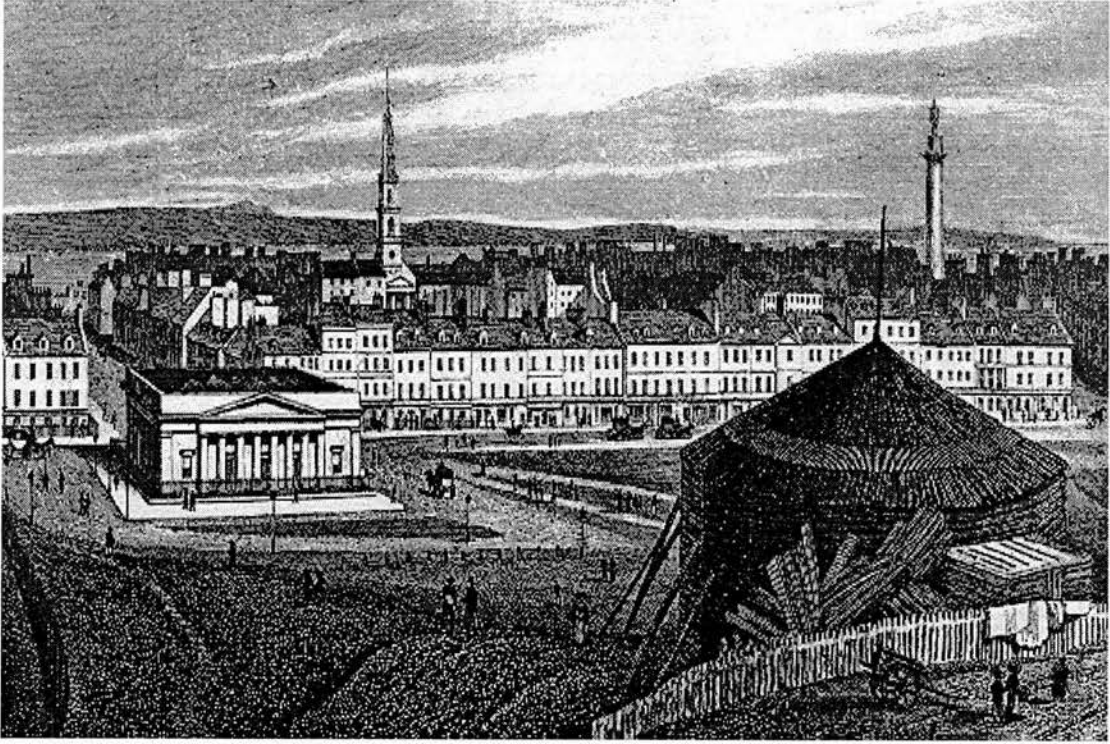


Figure 61: View of the Royal Insitution and New Town from South, drawn by T. H. Shepherd

With space becoming increasingly scarce inside the building, however, Playfair was asked to extend the building by sixty feet and to add side porticos in 1831. Additions to the Royal Institution included an extension to the front portico with eight columns, the placing atop of a statue of the young Queen Victorian, and several large sphinxes for decoration.



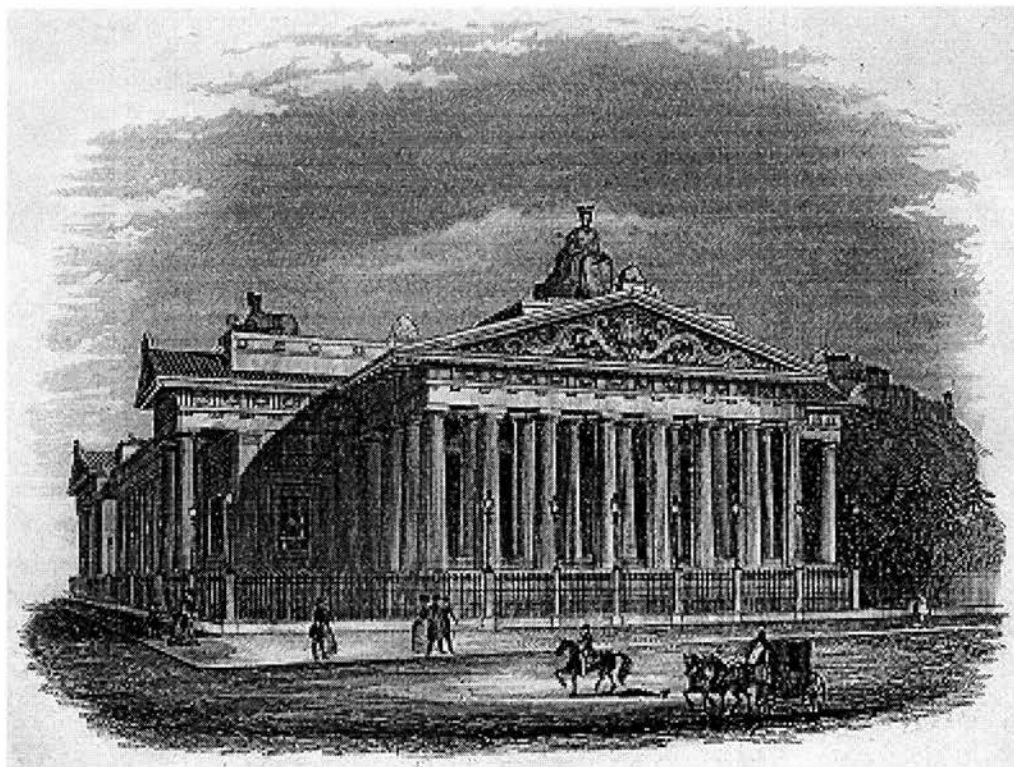


Figure 61: The Royal Institution after Playfair's additions, 1831

Playfair was extremely well-connected and fed off the rich source of commissions that Whig progressivism, especially after 1832, had dealt. His patrons included Lord Rutherford, who was liberal M.P for Leith, member of the Free Church, trustee for the Board of Manufactures and Lord Advocate. Indeed, it was Rutherford who was influential in securing for Playfair the commission to build the Free Church college at the southern head of the Mound. On acquiring this prime site in 1845, the Free Church held a competition for a college building. The competition was judged by the architect of the Houses of Parliament, Sir Charles Barry, who declared the competition void in the light of the poor quality of the submissions. Meanwhile, Lord Rutherford had used his influence and weight on the Mound to champion Playfair as the most appropriate architect. The semi-Gothic construction was shoe-horned into the small space overlooking the New Town in the late 1840s, framing the axis up the Mound with distinctive and picturesque twin towers. With two buildings already secured on the Mound, it merely remained for Playfair to complete his overall monopoly with his final building, the National Gallery.

## C: Playfair's National Gallery of Scotland

The National Gallery has been called "one of the two or three finest classical buildings in Edinburgh", and is considered to be one of Playfair's "masterpieces" (Youngson, 1966). Certainly, Playfair saw the National Gallery as a defining monument to his career. On writing of his experiences of accompanying the Queen to Donaldson's Hospital, where Victoria praised the architect, Playfair quipped:

I am like to laugh at the smiles frequently bestowed on me since the Queen and the Prince spoke to me at the Hospital - people who would have hardly acknowledged the architect before. Fools! Don't they see it is the architecture that is noticed not the man. If the Queen now were to confer any mark of distinction upon me it should surely be when the National Gallery shall be finished and found worthy which Godsend it may be (MS 9704).

But such were the physical, political and economic obstacles to the completion of the gallery scheme that from his completed designs of 1849, the Gallery was not to be finished for 10 years. Playfair never saw the National Gallery in its finished state. He died in March 1857, the obituary of the *Building Chronicle* reading:

If, in an architectural point of view, we have reason to be proud of our city and of the complimentary name by which it is widely known, it is to the genius of such artists as Mr Playfair that we owe, to a great extent, its highly classical character as manifested in the various splendid buildings by which it is adorned (*Building Chronicle*, No. 37, April 1856).

Obtaining the site itself posed little difficulty. The Free Church, which had a predetermined motive for allowing Playfair to set off his college with a further picturesque adornment, gave up its land for £3,000. The city of Edinburgh, which also owned part of the Mound site, expressed its civic allegiances to the Academy, whose accommodation Playfair was to include in the scheme, with a nominal sale of £1,000. The delays, however, arose out of two formidable obstacles: firstly, the very unusual physical properties of the site; and secondly, the continued ambiguity of the National Gallery's status, as its administration increasingly fell between civic, national and state-derived impulses.

As the architect of both the Academy and the Board, Playfair's appointment to design the structures which were to accommodate these institutions was inevitable. The

architect's initial designs of 1845 were based in the axiomatic that two buildings were required for this purpose. The first design showed two magnificently decorated edifices, separated by a road, fronted by ornate classical sculpture, whose side colonnades were large Doric constructions.

The second plan of 1848, similarly, shows two self-enclosed edifices in the Doric order,

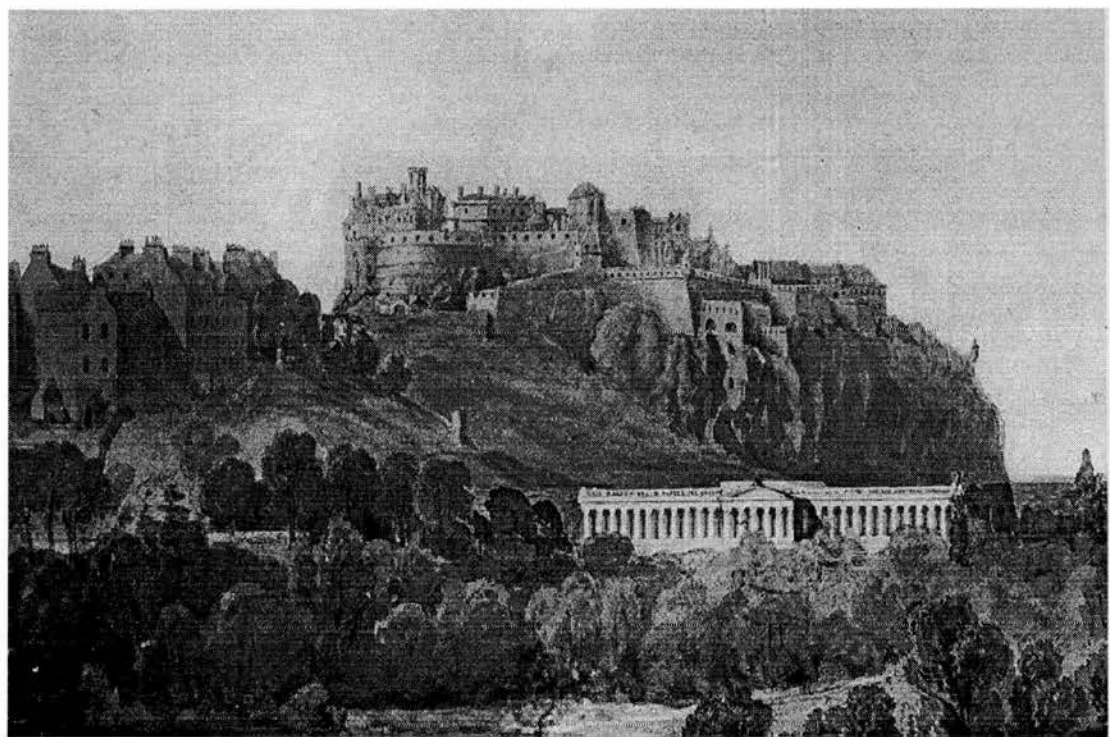


Figure 62: Early sketch design for buildings on the Mound, William Henry Playfair

complementing the already existing Royal Institution. The RSA building to the West and the National Gallery building to the East are, again, separated by a carriageway. In this design Playfair reveals his adherence to the picturesque by including a host of natural foliage that was to blend with the building and soften the trace of unmediated human production on the Mound site. At the very least, a graven ideal had been implanted among Edinburgh's professional elite to retain the striking visual effect of the Castle Rock and the Mound's already existing buildings. It was this ancient setting, after all, that elicited the Romantic medievalism of the city and that provided the picturesque contrast to the sanitised New Town. Playfair himself was particularly sensitive to the need, writing to Lord Rutherford in 1847: "...if the Exhibition Rooms be erected on the Mound, the

plan should be first fixed - and such a building secured as will not interfere with the beauty of the town nor with the Royal Institution Building nor the Free Church" (MS 9704, 25th December, 1847).

A growing problem now for Playfair was the sudden appearance of competing plans and designs for the galleries from rival architects. After the RSA had pressurised Playfair to speed up the working plans, at a time when he was suffering from ill health, Playfair resigned from the Academy in disgust. Despite placatory remarks from its leaders, Playfair was no longer the Academy's architect, leaving the way open for alternative suitors. Thomas Hamilton, architect of the High School on Calton Hill, the Physician's Hall in Queen Street, and Treasurer of the RSA, was one such rival. Hamilton contributed plans for twin buildings in the Doric order and exhibited the scheme in Paris (Gow, 1988).

The elongated twin structures were drawn complete with a cluster of classical and

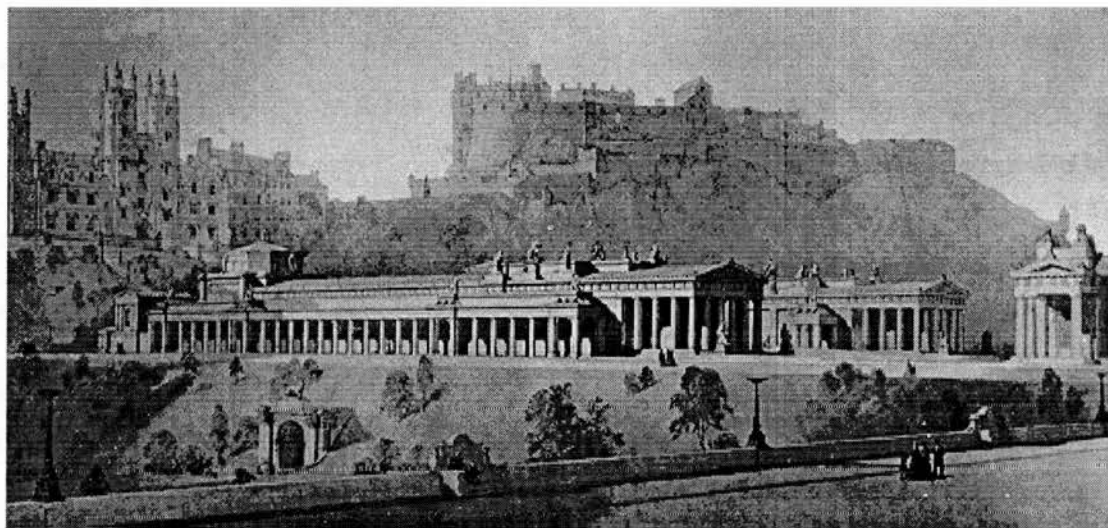


Figure 63: Proposed arrangements of buildings on the Mound, 1849, Thomas Hamilton, RSA

equestrian statues adorning its top and entrances. Playfair's ability to call upon his powerful patron, Lord Rutherford, in order to secure personal interests in the site, is apparent in his assertive letter of December 1847: "I fear Hamilton who is full of intrigue and vulgar taste. Pray guard against the danger" (MS 9704). In the event, Playfair's position was retained on the Mound, although the gallery scheme was to provide a series of additional difficulties to its architect.



One such difficulty was revealed when the Treasury clarified its unwillingness to provide funds for the costly scheme of two buildings. True to the combination of intervention and quasi-autonomy which had characterised the genesis of the National Gallery up to now, the British state felt itself justified to regulate the format and financial security of the National Gallery/RSA building. Its first task was to appoint Sir Charles Barry as chief advisor on the proposed new building. Barry responded with a design himself, and then suggested, in 1848, a more parsimonious solution: for Playfair to add a central storey to the already existing Royal Institution building. Playfair's reaction to this "very extraordinary" proposal was frosty. The architect of the Houses of Parliament, who Playfair had held in great esteem, came in for sharp criticism. In a letter to the M.P. for Edinburgh, William Gibson Craig, Playfair announced:

It is my decided opinion that such a proceeding would be hurtful to the existing internal accommodation - injurious to the surrounding objects - and be utterly destructive of any good architectural appearance the building may at present possess (MS 9704).

And to Barry himself, Playfair wrote of his "mortification" on learning of the former's implied opprobrium towards the proportions of the Royal Institution building "as to suggest the possibility nay, the propriety of raising it in height some five and forty feet". "In fact", continued Playfair, "I consider such a proceeding to be attended by insuperable difficulty in every view" (MS 9704).

As it transpired, the scheme for an additional storey was rejected. Playfair was asked to provide seriously pared down plans for one building (economically viable in that only four walls would require decoration and one administrative body could oversee the whole building). The ornamentation was to be stringent and Playfair was to provide constant up-dates of his plans to the Treasury in London. His subsequent drawings around 1849 show an increasingly stringent form of neo-classicism, with Ionic porticos (a recognised order for artists), providing a contrast with the Doric Royal Institution. Around 1850 Playfair's designs had been accepted by the Treasury apart from the "small turrets surmounting the lateral porticos, which their Lordships desired might be brought under the attention of the Architect with a view to their being subjected to such revision as might be deemed desirable" (NG 1/1/39: 163). The original Corinthian terminals were

cut to save expense as were the large flight of steps running from the Eastern pediment down to Prince's Street Gardens, the parapet vases, the cupolas and the figurative sculpture.

By 1855 the National Gallery building had again run into financial difficulties. Throughout construction Playfair had to deal with the physical idiosyncrasies of the Mound site. The Edinburgh-Glasgow rail tunnel, which had been cut through in the early 1840s, presented a physical predicament. Playfair had to build over the top of the tunnel and subsidence was a real possibility. Playfair's solution was to insert "floating girders" underneath the Gallery to distribute the weight more evenly. Other local difficulties related to the slope of the Mound itself and the soft earth on which

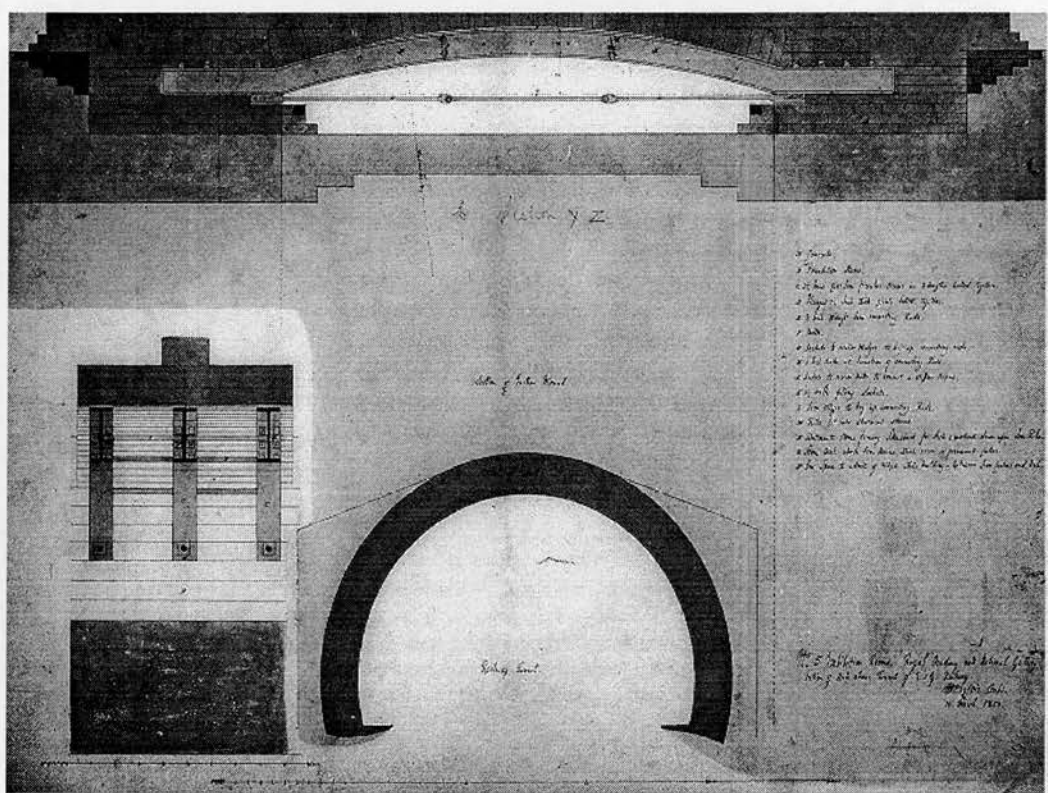


Figure 64: Cross-section through foundations showing Playfair's method of bridging the railway tunnel

it was based, the sewers which ran out of the Old Town and the main water pipe into the New Town. All this resulted in a burgeoning civil engineering bill and B. F. Primrose, secretary of the Board of Trustees, was forced to write to the Treasury to ask for additional finances. Primrose defended the vigilance and parsimony of the Trustees in the

proceedings and affirmed the absolute need for the completion of "this beautiful building, so ornamental to the city" (NG 1/1/40). The Treasury sanctioned a further £10,000 for the National Gallery: £5,000 to be levied on the Board and £5,000 from central government. Further Victorian bureaucracy and parsimony hampered the building of the gallery for the next few years, although, by 1855, the RSA eastern side was complete enough for the academy to hold its first exhibition in the new premises. At the time of Playfair's death, the austerity of the National Gallery building had begun

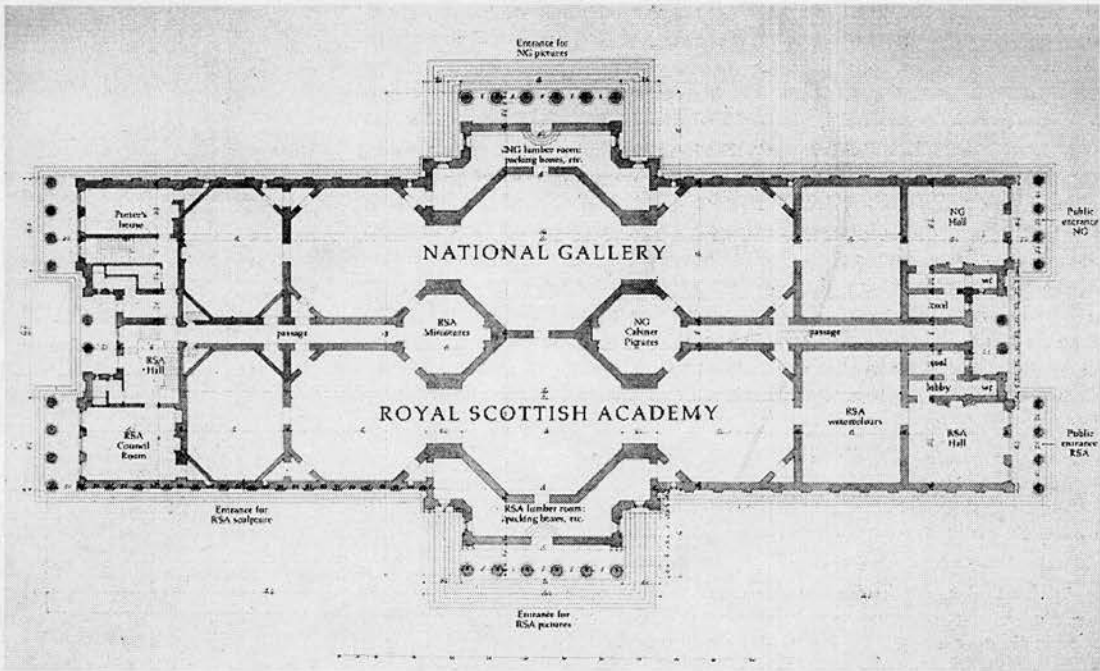


Figure 65: Plan of National Gallery of Scotland, 1852

to reveal itself. This was Grecian in its most severe and simple form at a time when, elsewhere, classical had ceased to be dominant, had deemed to be over-austere and had been replaced by the more playful and ornate gothic. The National Gallery contrasted heavily with the ostentatious commercial buildings that lined Princes Street, including Sir Charles Barry's own High Renaissance headquarters of the Life Association of Scotland. Playfair was circumspect towards the Gallery's stringency, writing to Lord Rutherford: "I feel sure that the architecture of this building will be too simple and pure to captivate the multitude, but I am certain I follow the right path in what I am doing, and so I am content" (MS 9704). The severity was softened somewhat by the honey-coloured stone

and the ornate chisel marks which adorned the wall faces (since obliterated by deleterious atmospheric conditions) (Gow and Clifford, 1988). That Playfair was not totally at ease with the classical imposition, however, is evident in his campaign to the RSA to lighten the puritanical style of the building by placing sculpture in the east and west pediments. This plan never materialised and the building retained its strict classical puritanism. After his death, the co-ordination of Playfair's plans were left to his principal clerk, James

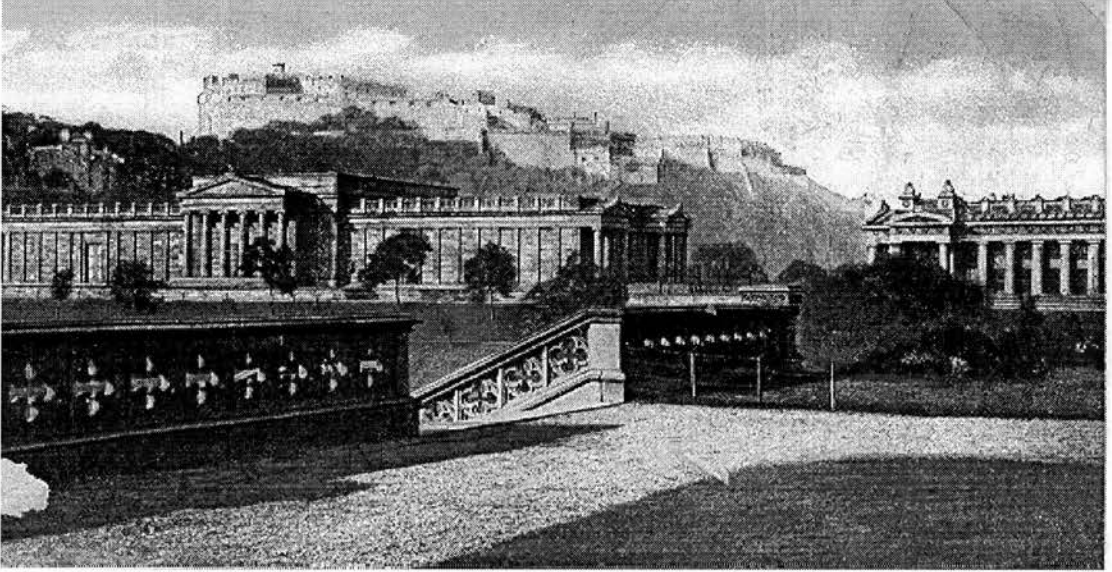


Figure 66: Edinburgh Castle and the National Gallery of Scotland

Hamilton and the western Gallery side was opened in March 1859. The whole architectural ensemble was now in place to register itself in the minds and actions of those who paid the gallery a visit. The classical edifice, in other words, was primed for national and civic effect. The next question is: how?



# THE HIGH WITHIN AND THE LOW WITHOUT: THE SOCIAL PRODUCTION OF AESTHETIC SPACE IN THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF SCOTLAND, 1859-70

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*Without* (Oxford English Dictionary, 1989)

**I.2a.** Outside (or out of) the place mentioned or implied; especially outside of the house or room; out of doors.

**III.8a.** In a state of not possessing; not having (as a possession of any kind, a part, an advantage, etc.); in want of, destitute of, lacking.

## A: Introduction

"Space is not a scientific object misappropriated by ideology or politics...[it] is political and ideological" (Lefebvre, cited in Dufrenne, 1978: 318).

The idea that history begins at the layers of individual spatial experience, "at ground level, with footsteps" (de Certeau, 1985: 129) has been crucial to some contemporary forms of social, geographical and cultural enquiry. The work of the new cultural geographers, Harvey, de Certeau, back to Simmel, Benjamin, Lefebvre and the Situationists, has opened up the spaces, forms and activities of quotidian life to a rich social analysis that deals with the interfaces between our experience of space and its social context. Some of these propositions have been applied to the environment of the museum. The recent turn towards a social or political "anthropology" of museums, in particular, has concentrated on the spatial arena itself as operating to fulfil certain "ceremonial" programmes or ideological "scripts" (Karp and Lavine, 1991; Sherman and Rogoff, 1994; Pearce, 1992; Duncan, 1995; Vergo, 1989). The visitor, here, is inscribed in a web of sequenced spaces and arrangements of sounds, colours and objects that provides a "stage set", shaping and structuring the visit according to dominant aesthetic and social interests.

Museums, under such scrutiny, are symbolic sites which circulate ideological effects. Through their systems of installation, the layout of their rooms, the labelling of

their objects and their iconographic schemes, museums have been claimed to produce colonial identities (Coombes, 1988), confer artistic value on objects (Bourdieu, 1993) and authorise state ideologies (Duncan and Wallach, 1980). The museum's artefacts, in turn, are not considered to be neutral or static units of value that present the same face to all. Rather, they are set up as active shapers of experience that take on multiform effect according both to the museum context - its design and visual representation - and the visitor's own social and cultural identity.

Every museum, then, makes and remakes its space through layers of visual and ideological effect. Often this is an invisible organisation. In fact, the very socio-political efficacy of the museum is a product of the appearance of purity, neutrality and legitimacy that is produced by its own texts, architecture and iconography. These cultural and spatial forms give the museum an air of timeless truth, or an internal coherence (Sherman, 1987; Saumarez-Smith, 1991). The task of critical analysis, however, is to by-pass this anonymity. The critical analyst must look at the museum as a class of object which, through the construction of material "events", purposefully frames space and people in space according to historically and ideologically specific conditions. This leads commentators such as Duncan and Wallach (1980) to characterise museums as "ceremonial monuments", resembling traditional sites of power/knowledge rituals such as churches.

This chapter fits into a similar turn to the "spatial" via the "critical" in that it seeks a socio-cultural investigation of the spatial relations that pertain to the National Gallery of Scotland from 1859-70. This ensemble consists of architectural, aesthetic, decorative, and normative layers of meaning which accompanied the early structuration of the building's internal and external environment. There would be several ways of organising this investigation, but I have chosen a more or less chronological analysis that supposes a hypothetical visit. Starting from (1) the initial external sight of the gallery - its architecture and setting - the visitor confronts (2) the gallery's internal topography, ornamentation, and decor. From here, our putative observer encounters (3) the collection itself, the layout of the objects and their iconographic efficacy; and coterminously (4) the internal regulations and codes of behavioural conduct expected and reinforced in the

gallery. The combination of these zones of museological effect constitute a chain of experience that, at every stage, produces meanings that are crucial to the core function of the gallery as a whole: these include the particular field of power relations that give the museum its essential character, its high cultural status and inner workings.

By carving up the spatial relations into experiential layers I hope to reveal how the National Gallery of Scotland's space operated in order to give the objects a public patina; how a certain aesthetic order was imposed as the gallery defined the boundaries of fine art; how concessions were made to a public; but how also the gallery favoured certain forms of viewing experience over others. Two broad themes run through this pursuit. Firstly, the gallery is analysed as a professionally controlled space. Having in mind Chaney's remark that "professionals can be characterised by their ability to control social space" (1994: 141), I have sketched some of the relations between the National Gallery of Scotland's external/internal domains and the precepts of Edinburgh's professional leaders. This is particularly apt since the idea of a gallery relied very much on notions of classical purity that marked the enlightenment world-view.

Secondly, I have focused on a resultant facet of the gallery's aesthetic space - that it was internally and socially differentiating. At work through the gallery's spatial relations were certain distinctions between groups of visitors, the informed/high and the uninformed/low, in particular. Despite being lauded as universally accessible, the gallery, in effect, served to privilege professional and bourgeois identities and modes of contemplation above "lower" or "popular" modes and identities. The coherent set of cultural dispositions and orientations belonging to the former, which can be subsumed under Bourdieu's term *habitus*, fitted well with the gallery's spatial order: whereas the values and predispositions of the uncultured *habitus* fitted less well with the space.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> On *habitus* see chapter two, note 34. Bourdieu formally defines the *habitus* as follows: "the strategy generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situation...a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moments as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions that makes possible the achievement" (1977: 72, 95). Some core features are worth reiterating. 1) Schemes of perception, the ability to classify, de-code or understand practices and texts are acquired or learnt. Cumulative exposure to particular social conditions, formal/informal education, for instance, instills in the individual a matrix of dispositions and strategies which generate

Indeed, this socio-spatial hierarchisation of the gallery pointed up the historical genealogy of the institution as a whole. The gallery emerged as a domain of cultural capital that articulated and reinforced (Edin)bourgeois norms of civility and sociation. The high aesthetic, to this extent, was a central resource for professional expertise and purity; the gallery a privileged space for performances of bourgeois distinction.

One problem should be mentioned from the outset. An obstacle to a highly descriptive reconstruction of the "National Gallery experience" is lack of documentary evidence. Little aside from the relatively dry official minutes and records of the Board of Trustees is available. Apart from these sources, I have relied on newspaper accounts, letters, the gallery's catalogue and the curator's reports and memos for evidence. There is one representation of the gallery interior that dates from around the late 1860s by an unknown artist. This represents the centre octagon and is a useful text of *reconnaissance*.

Specific questions which relate to the audience, however - who attended and why - are impossible to answer in detail. I have included the abstract returns for the National Gallery of Scotland as *Appendix III* from which some information on visitors can be gleaned. For instance, Saturday evenings had been designated as a free slot for the "working classes", when numbers seemed to increase. Yet, beyond reporting that an average of two hundred and eighty six visitors came to the gallery on each Saturday in 1860; or that "copiers" constituted around 2,000 of the visits to the gallery in 1863, very little can be presumed of these visitors. In particular, to assume that every one of the visitors on a Saturday evening was working class is actually to truncate a very complex phenomenon, to disavow knowledge of the spatial discriminations which this class would have experienced in the gallery and to accept the official rhetorics of the Board itself. The task, as already mentioned, is to get behind the neutral and anonymous appearance in order to look at the interface between power, ideology and order in the gallery. In other

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behaviours and reactions to familiar "events". 2) These competences are so bound up with the conditions in which they are acquired that they lay outside the apprehension of the actor. Behaviour appears to take the form of objectively guided ends - "agents to some extent fall into the practice that is theirs" (Bourdieu, 1990:90). 3) *Habitus* is essentially a corporeal quality in that it exists in and through the bodily practices of individuals - ways of talking, dressing, holding oneself, moving, looking.



words, the aim is to reveal the arbitrary nature of the gallery construct itself; to try and strip away the layers of spatio-aesthetic meaning that determined the relations between the gallery and its first visitors.

### **B: Layer One: The External Spatial Zone Of The National Gallery**

"Nothing could differ more from the old type of classical temple, as the contrast between the erudite aristocratic severity of the National Gallery of Scotland and the cheerful welcoming exuberance of Kelvingrove in its people's park, nicely illustrates [sic]" (Waterfield, 1991: 21).

Starting with the building itself, then. Even before a visitor enters an art museum, a range of effects, presuppositions and modes of perception are set in play. The external shell of the edifice, itself a complex historical product of ideas on style, systems of funding and architectural technicalities, imposes itself contiguously on the viewer who stands before it. The first concrete experience, in other words, relates to form. The shape, style, colour and formal composition of the building initiates the interface between perceiver and object. Such stylistic elements suggest the purpose of the building, expected codes of behaviour and to who the visitor is responsible for the visit. In short, buildings "do things"; they leave clues, circulate ideologies and set up certain expectations as to what's "in store". A corollary package of meanings are dispersed with the mere knowledge of the building's type. Buildings carry with them verbal labels ("prison", "school", "church") that imply in any given culture a set of meanings as to their function and status.

Turning our gaze to the National Gallery of Scotland, we can pose a series of questions on how the building might have operated externally to shape visitors' expectations. In what sense did the building relay the nature of its contents? What effect did the geographical setting have on the gallery's cultural efficacy? And how did this work to reinforce the status claims and identities of some constituencies of Scottish society over others?

In 1861 the Board of Trustees of the National Gallery of Scotland wrote to the National Gallery in London to request information on security arrangements; and, in doing so, wrote proudly of the National Gallery of Scotland, that it "stands within that enclosure isolated by itself" (NG1/3/32). Through the Board's eyes, the gallery's setting

on the Mound provided a kind of cultural amphitheatre that produced, preserved and protected the “sacred” content of the works inside. This self-enclosed feel was concentrated by Playfair's other buildings, the Royal Institution and the Free Church college, which closed off the vista to the south. The gardens, further, provided a semi-tranquil formality which set the gallery within its own quasi-hermitage. Immediately, the gallery's purpose, in other words, was identified with something civilised, majestic and separate from the blemishes of everyday life.<sup>2</sup>



Figure 67: *A view of Edinburgh from the North of the Castle Rock, Showing the Castle, the New Town and the Firth of Forth*, D. O. Hill, c. 1860

By the 1830s and 40s, Prince's Street had become a highly commodified thoroughfare; home to ladies straw hat shops, coffee rooms, hotels, bookshops, dyers, tailors, furriers, bootmakers, a cigar shop, a tax office as well as an elaborate series of banks and insurance companies. Many of the street's residential bourgeoisie had already fled the commercial tumult to the relative serenity of the New Town. The railway had also brought the "seedier" side of Victorian production to the pleasure grounds of the original

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<sup>2</sup> Including some rather pungent smells! Just before the gallery opened in 1859 complaints were made of "unwelcome exhalations...in the elevated district at the head of the Mound, *where of all places*, one might least expect to suffer from defective drainage" (*Edinburgh Evening Courant*, Tuesday March 1 1859, my emphasis).

gardens, and declared itself the harbinger of industrial progress from the west.<sup>3</sup> The combination of these two features of modernity (commerce and rail) may not have wholeheartedly disturbed the sensibilities of all the Mound's gatekeepers. As noted, the Board of Trustees was already combining commercial interests with fine art and design from the eighteenth century; and subsequent methods at the Trustee's Academy had been based on the utility of fine art for industrial and commercial products. But, as I will intimate below, even the Board found itself sanctioning the difference between high art and a less "pure" realm of value as it was adorned in the clothes of refined culture. And for adherents of a "pure aesthetic" such as Playfair, who detested commercial buildings, and others of Scotland's intelligentsia, impinging commercial values were a particular source of concern. In fact Playfair was already experienced in banishing the stains of Victorian economy from the area, having been given the task of suppressing the visibility of the railway in the mid 1840s. Playfair marshalled the construction of a large stone wall and embankment "high enough to conceal the locomotives and rolling stock from the drawing-room windows of the houses in Prince's Street" (Youngson, 1966: 278). He also refused to design a single commercial building and took severe exception to William Burn's willingness to design factories.

So, the concealment of any features which might detract from the purity of the scene was a task particularly befitting the detached civility of the building. Besides the setting of the Moundscape itself, which provided a "natural" sanctuary for the sacred contents, what gave the signification of the pure aesthetic added potency was the *form* of the building itself.<sup>4</sup> Like other "ritual sites", including other museums, the external

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<sup>3</sup> From the 1810s to the 1830s private feuars had keys to the nurseries in Prince's Street Gardens and railway proposals were met with strong opposition from proprietors (including Lord Meadowbank of the Board of Manufactures). By 1844, however, rail interests had gained sway and agreement was reached to extend the railway to Waverley.

<sup>4</sup> The position of the Gallery, sandwiched between Playfair's other buildings gives an added sense of seclusion. To an extent, the Royal Institution building, which directly faced the busy Prince's Street, cushioned the vagaries of commerce from the National Gallery. As the former was the home of the Board of Manufactures, itself a semi-commercial body, this would not have posed such a problem.



appearance of the National Gallery of Scotland actually helped to sustain, authorise and legitimate art as special, refined and distinguished.



Figure 68: View of National Gallery of Scotland

Paradoxically, the neo-classical stringency of the National Gallery design (a result, partly, of radical budgeting from the Treasury) adds to its overall impact. The Gallery exerts a monumental effect on the surroundings. In particular the east/west screens of columns, even today, dominate the townscape from North Bridge, despite the low Doric order. The long lengths of pilasters help to circulate the necessary connotations of the treasure house, the civic sanctuary, and puritan aestheticism. And the attic walls which "tower above the spectator as though in a high-security prison" (Gow, 1988: 26) complete the imposing feel of the edifice. In fact, Playfair had raised the central section four steps above the flanks for external effect. With the archetypal conjunction of Ionic columns supporting an entablature at the portico entrances (of which there were two - one for the RSA and one for the National Gallery in 1859) this scarce, austere but powerful spatial ensemble helped to connote the existence of a higher reality operating within its walls - of high culture. The gallery, <sup>following</sup> Bourdieu, became the first stage in the symbolic production of the works inside, helping to render the ensuing experience as refined and polite; as implying an aesthetic mode of receptivity.

We must add to this observation, however, a point on social differentiation. Like all texts, buildings do not present the same face to all. The exact content and meaning of



the encounter depends on the visitor's own socio-biography, creating internal divisions in modes of contemplation. What a viewer brings to the encounter in the way of previous experiences and socially acquired systems of perception, alters exactly how the building is "read" as such. Without detailed knowledge of visitor's reactions to the gallery in the 1850s and 60s, it is impossible to reconstruct the lines of demarcation between various social constituencies. What is clear, however, is that members of the middle class would have been much more at ease with the building's imposition, as well as the idea of the museum itself, than those of the "lower orders". After all, classical was the very aesthetic that permeated the feeling of the New Town itself, with its Palladian Adam houses, in which the respectable and polished urban population resided; and that bespoke the arrival of the period (1780-1830) that saw the city's elite partake of the refined arts, learning and politeness.

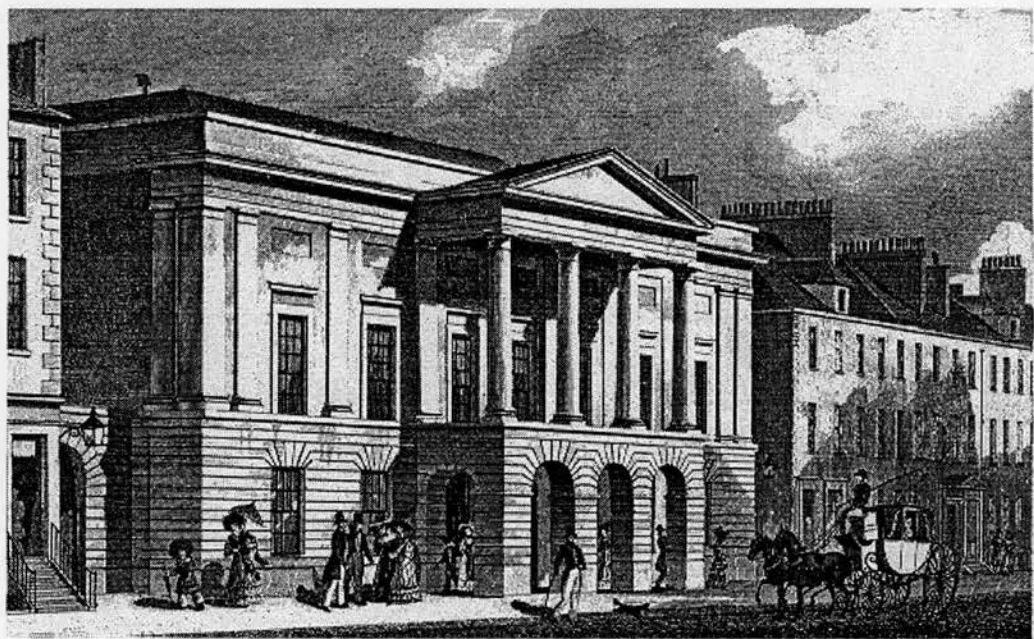


Figure 69: Assembly Rooms, George Street, New Town, drawn by T. H. Shepherd

Classical, in short, was the symbolic style of the Edinbourgeois - cultivated, restrained and rational. Broadly, the classical revival had been embraced by Edinburgh's lawyers and professionals, whose strong adherence to enlightened order, coupled with a fascination for classical history, science and calculation, represented one of the dominant cultural trends of the period. Indeed, the likes of Jeffrey, Cockburn, Erskine and other Whig

lawyers were sought for their cultural expertise and shared the responsibility for many of the developments in Edinburgh (the national monument, for instance). What was at issue for Scotland's enlightened leaders was the desire to rise above bad taste and immorality by espousing a classical model of art, scientific rationality, Whig reform and civic progress. A classical education - itself a sacred and enduring attribute - remained intrinsic to a professional career, and helped to reinforce the appropriate aesthetic tropes.

Furthermore, the Enlightenment had already set itself a task of sweeping away social disorder and medieval unreason; hence the proliferation of building types like prisons, hospitals, clinics and asylums, that indicated the gradual desire to confine, discipline, cure, restrain or improve. William Adam's Edinburgh infirmary of 1738, for instance, was built to house the diseased and infirm in a sparsely ornamented "u-shaped" design. His son Robert's New Bridewell Gaol was built on Calton Hill in 1791 to the Benthamite model of the Panopticon, in which the building's spatial order worked to the principle of "invisible inspection": while Robert Reid's Lunatic Asylum, modelled on Tuke's Retreat in York, was built in Morningside in 1823. Though not universally classical, the appearance of such buildings illustrates Scotland's leaders' aspirations to transcend darkness, ignorance and confusion (and hence social disorder) (Markus, 1982). Many of Edinburgh's other buildings of social order and stability, including the university, merchant's halls, law courts, schools, churches and hospitals did bear the clean, distinguished and symmetrical features of neo-classical architecture.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> By virtue of its simplicity and stringency classical also suited the strong current of Calvinism which ran through Edinburgh society, particularly in its middle class philanthropic guise. Without espousing programmatic doctrines, committees, trustees and civic sponsors naturally endorsed classical at a time when superabundance was dealt with caution. As Nenadic (1994) has argued, the evangelical backlash against luxury and conspicuous consumption in the wake of the Napoleonic wars and economic downturn had all sorts of ramifications for Scottish material culture. The anxieties wrought by increased bankruptcies and unemployment, coupled with the Protestant distrust of fancy and sensuous culture in the 1820s and 30s, tempered the acceptability of luxurious furnishings and clothes. The ensuing approval of a "new restraint" in cultural display - a form of "conspicuous parsimony" - marked itself in the pastoral and paternal novels of the time. The new restraint also chiselled itself into the Edinburgh skyline in the form of puritanically stringent classical buildings with very little in the way of ornamentation for relief.

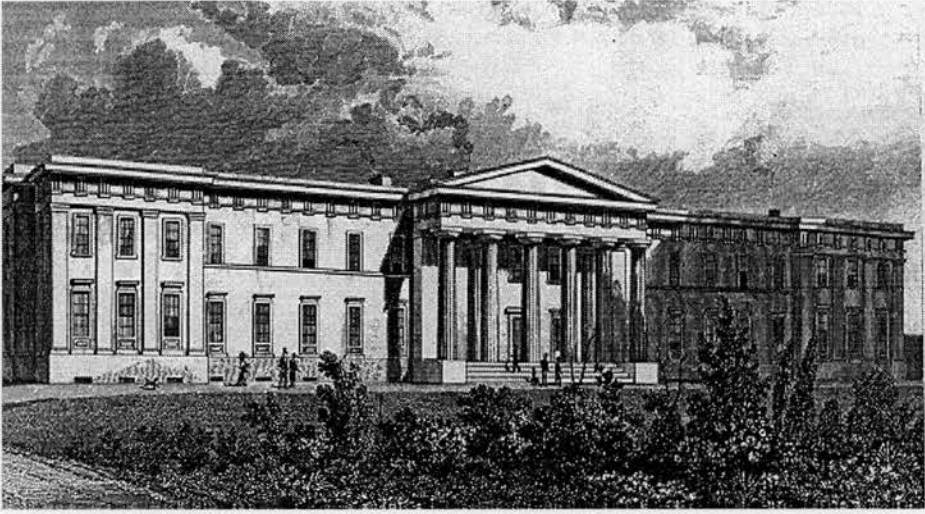


Figure 70: John Watson's Hospital, designed by William Burn, drawn by T. H. Shepherd

Extirpating barbarism from the increasingly respectable gaze of Edinburgh's classical New Town also meant symbolically connecting the Old Town with a backward, rude and deranged constitution. Notwithstanding the potent memories of romance and collective camaraderie that the Old Town had elicited, by holding up classical as a vital and cultivated urban trope, Edinburgh's ruling elite had condemned the former as antiquated, filthy and as "other". "The time is not very distant when the most wealthy and fashionable inhabitants of this town were content to reside in wynds or alleys, which their servants would now disdain to lodge in", wrote a correspondent to the *Scots Magazine*, in 1820. The classical New Town, it was believed, actually symbolised the nation's ability to appreciate the highest forms of culture. In particular, Edinburgh's elite could now look upon the Parthenon in the requisite cultivated manner; that is, with an informed gaze:

A taste for higher comforts having sprung up, the New Town rose to gratify it; this indulgence naturally begot still farther refinements...we shall furnish our country with the means of extending the national taste beyond any assignable limits. *We are therefore, it appears, just arrived at that happy moment when we can appreciate such a building as the Parthenon* (Anonymous, *Scots Magazine*, 1820, my emphasis).

This was particularly important as Scotland's leaders attempted to construct a respectable national culture in the wake of its Jacobite history. In contrast to classical, the medieval national resonances of "Scotch Baronial", with its pinnacles, castellated ornamentation and romantic asymmetry was clearly problematic for Scotland's "men of taste".

Consequently, "Baronial" remained largely an aristocratic extravagance with little popular hold or use in urban architecture.<sup>6</sup> On the one hand, "national" to this constituency was the organic totality of Britain and its architecture was to reflect the rich and elegant tradition that the continent (and England), provided. On the other hand, the Scottish castle implied a more "rude, gaunt and perhaps too-well remembered past" and was not accepted with anything like the enthusiasm which classical had generated amongst Edinburgh's middle and upper middle classes (Brogden, 1995: 31).

This does not mean, however, that classical was somehow more *popularly* accessible and vital. For Edinburgh's lower orders, for instance, the National Gallery exterior would have remained *sparse* and uncomfortable. The very imposition of the building, the aesthetic mode of reception that was implied for its entry, the lack of any quotidian features to the building that may have provided the uneducated with relief; all of this would *not* have formally excluded Scotland's subordinate classes from entrance; but equally the spatial ensemble certainly would not have worked to encourage popular participation. It is likely that awe, mystification, indifference or astonishment were the more prevalent reactions from these groups. As for the operation of a set of informal exclusions, it should not go unnoted that the Prince's Street Gardens area, of which the National Gallery was a part, was declared, in the 1850s, "to keep from the too close view of the New Town gentry the poor population of the Old Town" (cited in Youngson 1966: 256). Superior urban space, here, had become a means by which the lower orders

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<sup>6</sup> Walker has characterised Scottish Baronial and Gothic as representing the more "indigenous style" of "national romanticism"; as more "immediately relevant to the political and cultural consciousness of nineteenth century Scots society" (1995: 126); and as "a vehicle of national sentiment" (1995: 127). Classical, in Walker's view, was somehow inauthentic, derivative and unimaginative. But this seriously underestimates the pervasiveness of this style in Scotland as well as its rich, productive and material effect in the hands of the nation's most famous elite. Classical was not some kind of foreign imposition that undermined Scottish confidence but a vital, prolific and enlightened system of architecture that symbolised the city's status in the eyes of its leaders. Moreover, classical never clashed with the romantic structure of feeling that permeated Scottish civil society by the second quarter of the nineteenth century. The two cultural movements blended and complemented each other, as in the picturesque projects of William Stark and of Playfair himself (Noble 1982). It is further interesting to note that even Sir Walter Scott, the doyen of Scottish Romanticism, favoured the model of the Parthenon for the national monument in 1822, to fit with Edinburgh's unique setting.



and their pleasures could be distanced.

By the same token, classicism was perhaps the least accommodating of architectural systems for ordinary reception; it remained impervious to the untutored gaze and imperial in its imposition. Interestingly, one of Ruskin's Edinburgh lectures of 1853 had irreverently exposed the "contemptible" authoritarianism of Greek architecture in Edinburgh. On subjecting Greek to criticism for its lack of naturalism (and comparing the lion's heads on Playfair's Royal Institution to those drawn from nature by Millais), Ruskin spoke of the classical proclivity to place ornamentation, if at all, at the elevated levels of building tops, rather than at eye level. "Walk round your Edinburgh buildings, and look at the height of your eye, what you will get from them" he suggested; "Nothing but square cut stone - square cut stone - a wilderness of square cut stone for ever and for ever; so that your houses look like prisons, and truly are so; for the worst feature of Greek architecture is, indeed, not its costliness, but its tyranny" (Ruskin, 1855: 76). From the perspective of Ruskin's social-democratic aesthetics, classical architecture delivered nothing for the ordinary urban dweller but difficulty, expense and a sore neck.

A more varied, friendly and natural architecture, for Ruskin (friendly because based on the more accessible precepts of nature), was Gothic. In contrast to Greek, pointed architecture introduced the ornament "close to the spectator". At the medieval Lyon cathedral, for instance, the important details were merely eight feet off the ground. Hence, Gothic operated at a more "collective" level - an architecture for "all men to learn" (Ruskin, 1855: 11). Yet, Edinburgh had adopted its own ancient idiom for national and civic purposes and apart from some churches and the Scott monument, Gothic was always secondary and marginalised, even in the late Victorian era. Official pressure to favour the resonant styles of Gothic or Elizabethan (the Gothic Houses of Parliament, in London, were supposed to elicit memories of an "English" medieval past), never materialised in Edinburgh.<sup>7</sup> Much of what Ruskin espoused in his vitriolic lectures in

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<sup>7</sup> Sir Charles Barry's Houses of Parliament (Pugin arranged the interiors) harked back to the achievements of a medieval English past which suited (especially Whig) interests; and Horace Walpole was a firm proponent. The massive and highly elaborate Gothic Parliament was built between 1840 and 1847, and certainly contrasted to the perceivedly flat, bland, rigid and uninspiring examples of Georgian neo-classicism in England's capital. Ruskin's insistence on the

Edinburgh, hence, fell on deaf ears. Always on the defensive, one suspects Ruskin knew in advance how much classical had permeated bourgeois Edinburgh's cultural *weltanschauung*. On subjecting Playfair's building on the Mound to social critique, for instance, Ruskin was careful not to make his diatribe into a personal slur, declaring: "It is not his fault that we force him to build in the Greek manner" (ibid.: 80).

Ruskin's mapping of architecture as socially communicative; that is, as materially productive and efficacious in the urban setting, returns us to the National Gallery. I have already spoken of the building acting like a frame, controlling the composition, establishing boundaries and eliciting memories. Through its setting, its acerbic style and its known existence as an art museum, the gallery functioned externally to keep the profane at a distance. No sign declared "for refined culture and its devotees only" because the pure and distinguished pleasures of its collection were always already signified via its external imposition. Paradox and dual-codedness, however, remained central to the National Gallery, as it did to the project of the museum as a whole. Another level of effect, in other words, was secreted through the gallery's syntax that did not necessarily smack of exclusion.

Official buildings like museums, adorned with the accoutrements of classical civilisation, *could* connote the hallowed virtues of universal education, refinement and national improvement, thereby maintaining the appearance of its universal access. The mere appearance of the temple structure imparted the widely held belief that everyone was, in theory, welcome to partake of the educational ideal. The values ascribed to ancient civilisation - democracy, learning, inspiration and civic virtue - particularly suited the interests of official patrons. Hence, in its statement on the role of the National Gallery, the Board of Manufactures spoke of the "opportunities which cannot be overestimated of rational amusement, mental cultivation and refinement of taste" (NG1/1/41). The Parthenon building was appropriated to reiterate these principles of national access and pedagogy. Merely seeing the temple structure was sometimes claimed to be sufficient to improve taste, to impart "correct manners" to all classes and to furnish

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rebirth of Christian-Gothic and his attacks on the uniformities of Grecian finally sealed the waning of the classical order, and paved the way for mid-Victorian Gothic revivalism.

Scotland's national population with a more refined set of perceptions. The writer to the *Scots Magazine* in 1820 offers exactly these sentiments:

To place the Temple of Minerva *before the eyes*, not of one or two travellers, but of the whole public, is the most certain means of *cultivating our national taste* and happiness at home, and, consequently, the power and importance of our country amongst other nations (Anonymous, *Scots Magazine*, 1820, my emphasis).

To this extent, the National Gallery's guardians officially justified the museum in terms of the national social good and placed themselves as forward-looking, benevolent and active protectors of the spiritual wealth that it contained. This was an identification of the gallery's purpose with the model of bourgeois culture it helped bring about and which connected with other spaces and discourses in the city such as theatres, concerts, libraries and philosophical societies. Visitors to the gallery could be construed as beneficiaries of civic culture and collective property; the gallery's nominal accessibility signified as an instance of the bourgeoisie's enlightened and democratising approach. Any potential critiques of the gallery's "exclusionary" nature could thereby be circumvented. What we are left with, in effect, is a building that, while securing bourgeois civic distinction, was able to appeal magnanimously to paternalism, public service and the ideals of mass national improvement. The gallery's symbolic power, in fact, resided exactly in its ability to do both.

### **C: Layer Two: The Entrance, Interior Topography And Decor**

"When not just the contents but the whole museum becomes part of the collection, the barrier is felt at the front door. Stepping out from the newly refurbished National Gallery of Scotland, for example, on to the streets of Edinburgh, is a disorienting experience. What's inside has nothing to do with what's outside. After the plush, lush interior, the daylight is harsh and there is litter. There is a sense of being let down, which has more to do with the after-effects of entertainment than of art" (Spalding, 1991: 167).

The process of entering a building is always a crucial level of the museum's productive force. This is particularly marked in the transition from the street and its attendant buzz to the relative solemnity and hush of the interior. In the case of many continental art museums the transition is flagged or predetermined, with the walk up a flight of

monumental steps. This, in effect, extends the building's zone of production outwards and downwards in a form of invitation. Each step towards the museum represents a step closer to the revered temple and higher to its consecrated objects. The grand entrance, usually a large classical, columned portico with imposing doors, completes the journey up and into the shell.

Such a scenario was never so clear-cut for entrants to the National Gallery of Scotland. The overall neo-classical arrangement had already sent out the requisite signals of high culture. Yet the effect was not particularly concentrated by the small elevation up to the wooden doors, which, themselves, were comparatively modest.

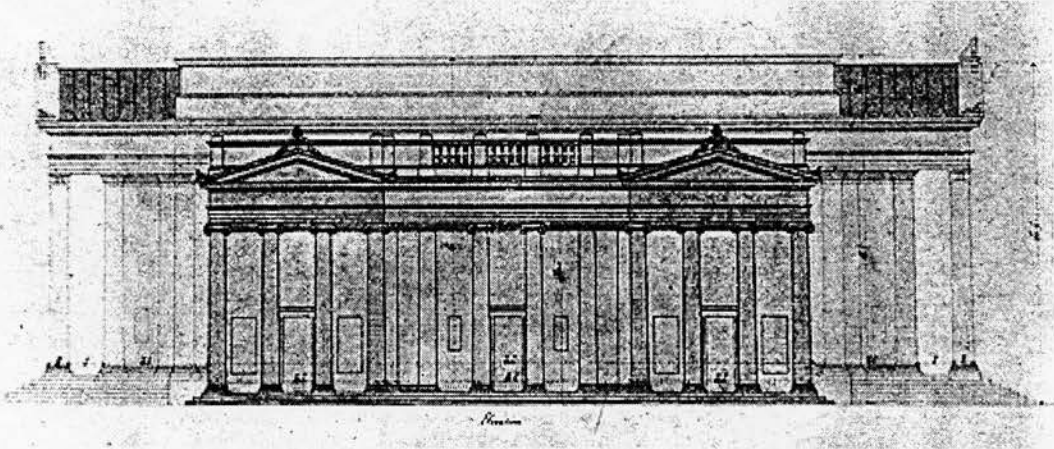


Figure 71: Front Elevation of National Gallery of Scotland

As far as the interior as a whole was concerned, "ornate", "splendid", "opulent" and "luxurious" were not adjectives that accurately described the general feel. By all accounts the rectangular entrance hall, for instance, was rather stark, consisting of "Railing, Ticket Taker's Stand, Umbrella Stand, Table", all in oak, that were ordered in 1859 just before the gallery opened (NG6/1/1). Equally, the decorative treatment of the gallery space was not ostentatious, fitting with the principles of civic rationality that symbolised the genesis of the gallery. Always residual in the design of the interior, in other words, was a quite rigorous adherence to stringent, enlightened bourgeois notions of taste: an amalgam of intellectualised pure aesthetics and dominant trends in the handling of country house decor in Scotland. This all suited the operational requisites of the professional middle class *habitus*.



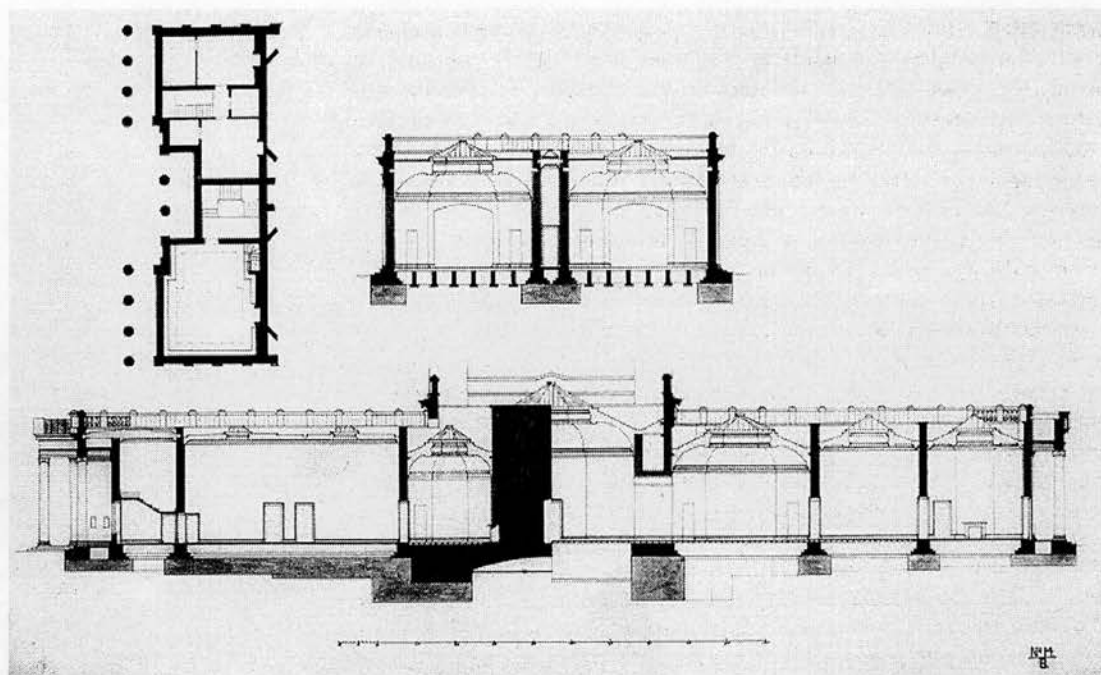


Figure 72: Cross-section and plan of internal arrangement of octagons

Playfair's topological treatment of the gallery's internal structure revolved around the construction of two sets of octagonal galleries (one set for the RSA and one set for the National Gallery) with additional smaller octagons freed up in the middle as cabinet rooms. This was a maximum utilisation of space with the deep arches connecting the octagons allowing additional areas for pictures. The biggest octagons in the middle could accommodate the largest pictures and were pure geometrical compositions. The other rooms varied in height to carefully co-ordinate the amount of light coming from above, with the wall space and ensure even illumination. In fact, the choice for top-lit galleries (*vis-a-vis* the use of skylights) was becoming increasingly dominant in Europe and England, and illustrated the enlightened bourgeois approach to building galleries. As a result, the overall feel of the space very much resembled earlier examples of gallery construction in England. Gow (1988), Waterfield (1991) and Clifford (1982; 1987; 1988) have all noted the similarities between the top-lit galleries and round-headed arches at Dulwich, the suites of rooms at Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery (1788-89) by George Dance (later to become the British Institution) and Playfair's National Gallery interior.

Inasmuch as the suite of arched rooms presented a certain fluidity and permeability to the space, it was actually possible to look through the set of galleries in

one visual sweep. This in itself was quite unusual for a European gallery but was made possible from the small size of the gallery in Edinburgh. A by-effect of this linkage of axial galleries was to immediately open up the function of the gallery to all visitors: its mode of operation, its expected forms of behaviour, who did what, with whom and where, and the objects on display. In other words, an awareness of the gallery's core epistemology - to display, collect, survey, classify, entertain - and of the kinds of people who used and felt comfortable in the gallery, was secreted instantaneously on the viewer in and through the linear sequencing of the National Gallery space. Structurally, this was a part reversal of the order of the "total institution" (such as the asylum) where inhabitants resided deep within the shell, facilitating surveillance, and where those who ran the building permeated its surfaces. In a concentrated sense, the National Gallery of Scotland's visitors flitted through the visible channels and were "surveyed", less extensively, from afar: while those professionals who created the rules of the building inhabited the deep structures beyond the boundaries and limits of the visitor. So, the gallery was not an institution of confinement but of display.<sup>8</sup> Spatial control worked *indirectly* through certain conventions, texts and regulations on behaviour and authority, as I will develop later.

Turning towards the decoration and furniture for a moment, we can briefly outline how the National Gallery's interior continued to articulate the ideo-logics of Edinburgh's professional faction, thereby maintaining the purity of the space. In accordance with the gallery's economy of taste, as well as its historical genesis as a semi-national, semi-civic, yet non-regal institution, the decor was particularly stringent. Unlike many of the big continental museums (Schinkel's museums in Italy or Germany, for instance), the gallery did not contain friezes, palatial chandeliers, elaborate ceilings, monumental staircases or sumptuous rococo furniture. For both financial and aesthetic reasons its lodestar was hyper-rationality and the excision of all that detached from the pictures themselves. And to this extent, the gallery resembled sparse seventeenth century Dutch interiors.

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<sup>8</sup> Unless one considers a Foucauldian reversal where it was the art works rather than the public that were confined and surveyed.

The design of the interior had been assigned to Playfair and his most valued decorator D. R. Hay. Hay was considered to be the "first intellectual house painter" in Britain whose ideas on colour theory and rational design had taken on the patina of science. From his experiments in country and town houses, Hay had developed a scheme of harmonious colouring that was claimed to particularly suit picture galleries and the hanging of Old Masters. The core feature was the use of red or claret as the background for pictures. Such a colour was believed to be "most effectual in giving clearness to works of high art, such especially as may have suffered from imperfect pigments employed by the artist" (Clifford, 1988: 47); while harmony in colour was grounded in the principle that the background should not be brighter than the brightest tones in the picture or darker than the darks (Waterfield, 1991).

This was not a particularly novel scheme. Most pictures in country houses were foiled against tones of red silk or other fabric in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As Clifford indicates, "Nash used maroon for the picture gallery at Attingham, Shropshire, in 1805-7, as did the painters Benjamin West and J. M. W. Turner for their own galleries" (1988: 48). In Scotland, the Duke of Argyll's princely seat at Inverary Castle had richly decorated rooms, including a saloon with walls hung with crimson silk to display the series of family portraits. And the walls of the Great Drawing Room at Blair Castle by Steuard Mackenzie were adorned with red silk damask (Gow and Rowan, 1995; Gow, 1992). Both Playfair and Hay would have been *au fait* with trends in country house arrangements through their architectural and decorative commissions in Scotland. Indeed, it was Hay who took on the task of designing the interior of Scott's Abbotsford; of Queen Victoria's Holyroodhouse; and, in the urban context, Henry Raeburn's studio in George Street, again using a claret colour for the walls.

Unlike country houses, however (and unlike the RSA suite of rooms in the building with their dark red felt walls), the National Gallery did not hang sumptuous fabrics like silk. Instead, the vertically ordered planks were kept visible and painted "claret", while the cove was painted cream and the cornice appeared to be pale oak grained. The chairs, designed by Playfair, were of the classical style and similar to those

found in the Royal College of Surgeons. The legs resembled columns, with scrolls for decoration - archetypal New Town chairs, in fact.



Figure 73a: National Gallery Chair

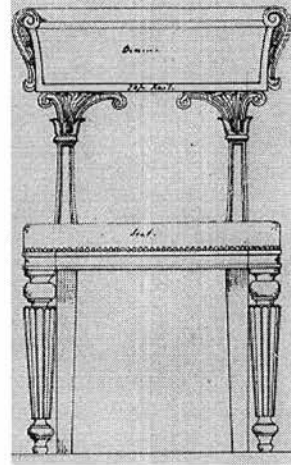


Figure 73b: Design for Royal College of Surgeons Chair, W. H. Playfair

All benches and seats were covered red and the guard rope was maroon. In accordance with Hay's colour scheme, the carpet (Dutch weave) was of a green hue which completed the sense of professional co-ordination; green had been intellectually "proven" to be the most effective complementary colour to red (Clifford, 1988; Gow, 1992).

All this served to retain a rigid form of aesthetic Puritanism to the internal space. Very little decorative clutter competed with the primacy of the objects on display. Victorian restraint in its professionalised form had coded the interior in such a way as to reaffirm the pure aesthetic. It was an aesthetic based in both New Town gentility (where, of course, pictures also hung) and country house fashion, but filtered through classical and enlightened rationality. This "intellectualisation of taste" conjoined a utility of display with a professional middle class distinction, part of which was the assertion of social distance from the patrician idea of culture as ostentation.<sup>9</sup> The decorative ensemble was far from splendid or luxurious, but neither was it overly welcoming, especially to those classes who had no real experience of, or education in the idea of the absolute or pure

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<sup>9</sup> The transposition of the New Town interior to the gallery context is an interesting process here. There is a sense in which one could sketch a decorative shift from interior, domestic, privacy to civic, "public" exteriority with the attendant shift in modes of apprehension that this implies.



value of the work of art; that is, the effacement of all that was extraneous to the efficient display of the work itself.

#### **D: Layer Three: The Collection, Catalogue And Iconography**

The next set of questions we must answer are these: How did the material arrangement of the collection contribute to the gallery's overall distinction? How were the art objects ordered and classified? To what extent did the collection interact with the internal space in order to "produce" the gallery's epistemology? What texts or discourses accompanied the arrangement and whose interests and identities were privileged or circumvented? This is our third level in the chain of museological production.

Perhaps more than any other single layer in the social production of aesthetic space, the manner in which a gallery's aesthetic objects are acquired, disposed and made visible is primary to its mode of operation. A gallery's "iconographic programme" structures a multiplicity of socio-aesthetic meanings, each of them crucial to the overall function and status of the gallery, to its patrons or commanders (be they nation-states, cities or private individuals) and to the varying forms of reception that are possible or elevated. The collection it is, in short, that forms the locus of the eye, of power and of the gallery's self-definition as culturally refined.

##### *i) The Collection Layout*

Understandably, the National Gallery of Scotland's iconographic scheme can not be compared with those of other Universal Survey Museums in breadth or intensity. The visual order of the gallery did not overly resemble the post-revolutionary Louvre's (re)presentation of French art as the summation of cultural civilisation, for instance - through guides, sculptures and labelling as accompanying "texts" of national affirmation (Duncan and Wallach, 1980). Nevertheless, the classification and installation of the Edinburgh gallery's three hundred or so objects was an important moment in the organisation of its ceremonial experience. The iconographic pattern, in other words, diffused a requisite level of high cultural codes for the constitution of a distinctive, "public", civil and hierarchised space of representation. In every room it is possible to

decipher some component feature in the overall production of the gallery's cultural order: of the socio-aesthetic priorities of the Trustees, of the modes of perception played out by the "educated" and "naive", and of the turning of erstwhile "hidden" objects of private delectation into "public" objects of artistic contemplation.



Figure 74: Interior of the National Gallery of Scotland, c. 1867-77, Anonymous. The view is of the centre octagon

As with much else to do with the gallery, aesthetic predilection was always tempered by available resources, which in this case were scant. For a start, the gallery's collection could not boast decent or representative specimens of the "canon" and was seriously deficient in many areas of art history. Having at least a representative of the key periods in the Enlightenment narrative of art was a prerequisite for Universal Survey Museums on the Continent. The ensuing chronological hang, according to schools and periods, was

believed both to unveil the underlying laws, truths, rules and structures behind the progress of art and to thereby foster an amelioration in the educative capacities of visitors. Mechel's arrangements in Vienna were based in exactly this kind of combination of enlightened bourgeois pedagogy and disaffection with Baroque or decorative principles of abundance. And in early nineteenth-century Germany a set of principles had been formulated by the respected critic Dr Waagen and the architect Schinkel. Seling sums up their programme on acquisition and layout as follows:

Is a work to be hung 'a good painting', that is, 'a worthy representative of the time and school to which it belongs?' Once this is settled your aim should be (1) to 'display the originators of the various trends...as fully as possible as the true, principal and fundamental masters', (2) 'to obtain a complete idea of those great masters who are specially noteworthy for spirited variety, as for instance Rubens', (3) to show 'national painters who are at the same time great artists...as completely as possible', (4) 'to be saving in pictures by masters of limited individuality...and who tend to repeat themselves', and (5) 'to represent only by one or two examples subordinate masters working in a particular trend'" (1967: 114).

As a result, Universal Survey Museums collected *en masse* heterogeneous objects from different periods, filtered them through the homogenising assumptions of enlightened philosophy and established "ideal paths" for visitors to follow through the collection. Typical quantities of displayed objects ranged anything from four hundred and fifty to six hundred or more. Authoritative texts or briefs gave added coherence to the museum's iconography, making explicit the axioms of art history, further directing the visitor's tour according to historicist, rational and universal truths and resolving all of the individual objects into an essence of European civilisation and its component styles.

For the most part, no such simple overriding system of taxonomy was implemented at Edinburgh. In fact, put bluntly, the base assumptions articulated by Waagen and Schinkel could never have been carried out even if the gallery's administrators were willing. A cursory review of the collection reveals why. Apart from a few choice examples acquired by the key players in the gallery's socio-genesis (i.e., the Royal Institution for the Encouragement of Fine Arts, the Royal Scottish Academy, the Board of Trustees itself and the Royal Association for the Promotion of Fine Arts in Scotland) the National Gallery of Scotland really had no significant representatives of



Italian art from Raphael to the late seventeenth century, of the "French School" pictures of Claude or Poussin, nor of the notable works of Flemish, Dutch or Spanish masters.<sup>10</sup> Gaps in the historical scheme were slowly filled over the decade with bequests and gifts (most notably Lady Murray's bequest of 1861 of foreign masters including French paintings by Greuze, Watteau, Boucher and Lancret). But in general, the weakness of the collection militated against the implementation of a complete historical scheme. This all proved to be an agitation for the critic of the *Daily Scotsman* who was obviously familiar with the working hypotheses of other European galleries and their contents:

A public gallery ought to fulfil two conditions - to be capable of teaching art, and of forming the taste of the public. To accomplish this successfully, the gallery ought to contain a due proportion of works by the principal artists of each school or country, as it is only by comparing and contrasting the properties of the different schools that their merits can be ascertained, and correct judgments formed. Judged by this standard, the present gallery is lamentably deficient. It contains no specimens of the revival of art in either Italy or Germany - that pure spring from which Raphael and succeeding artists quaffed so freely. None of the succeeding great masters of the Roman and Florentine schools are represented and the leading men of the Flemish and Dutch schools with the exception of Vandyke, are also wanting, or are represented by unfavourable...specimens. As a collection of the comparative claims of genius, it is therefore quite useless, and likely even to cause false notions and unfounded conclusions (*Daily Scotsman*, Saturday March 19, 1859).

However, it would have been odd to expect otherwise. In addition to the limited nature of the collection itself, space was never in abundance for the Trustees. With only six rooms to distribute the collection in, including the small cabinet-sized octagon, it would have been difficult to impose a strict chronological hang. Size often determined the placement of a picture and if an object was considered over-large it was sometimes rejected (as was the case with Harvey's *Leaving the Manse* in June 1860). Secondly, the

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<sup>10</sup> The exceptions were the Van Dycks (*Lomellini Family*; *St Sebastian Bound for Martyrdom* and *Portrait of an Italian Noble*); Bordone's *Venetian Woman at Her Toilet* (sixteenth century Italian); Tiepolo's *Finding of Moses* and the *Meeting of Anthony and Cleopatra* (eighteenth century Venetian); Guercino's *Madonna and Child* and *St Peter's Penitent* (seventeenth century Bolognesian); Bassano's *Portrait of a Gentleman* and the *Adoration of the Magi* (sixteenth century Venetian), which was attributed to Titian at the time; Zurbaran's *Immaculate Conception* (seventeenth century Italian); and some other less known works by the likes of Weenix, Furini, Paggi and Cambiaso.



amount of "modern" pictures in the collection (mainly provided by the Royal Scottish Academy) unbalanced the ensemble in favour of the contemporary and precluded a thorough historical sweep. Thirdly, in the course of its early development and procurement period, the National Gallery of Scotland appeared to suffer a certain disfavour in the acquisition of surplus pictures from London, which may have considerably bolstered its programme. In the period 1859-70, in particular, the Board constantly complained at the order of preference that prevailed in the disposition of pictures that were not required for immediate display by the London National Gallery. At times the Edinburgh gallery appeared to be overlooked in favour of Dublin's National Gallery and, particularly, the South Kensington Museum, indexing the centralisation of official arts policy in Victorian London.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, the principles of the continental enlightenment hang did not fully materialise in British galleries generally until quite late. The National Gallery in London, on its inception, did not hang its pictures according to continental fashions of historical development but stuck to a more traditional scheme - what Waterfield (1991) has termed a "picturesque hang". Robert Peel and important collectors opposed a national acquisition policy based on historical principles, instead preferring a decorative or "aristocratic" approach. This unified pictures into a jumbled ensemble from which the amateur was supposed to decipher the comparative claims of ancient masters. Resisting continental tastes in the light of the Napoleonic campaign was certainly a factor (the distrust of French aesthetic theory, for instance); as was lack of space and of collections that would allow a full evolutionary hang. In any case, Parliament refused to sanction an

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<sup>11</sup> There is also an issue of the Trustees' own lack of experience and verve, here. In 1857 both the *Scotsman* and the *Building Chronicle* chastised the governors of the National Gallery of Scotland for failing to obtain any specimens from the Krüger collection of German art that had been on sale in London at cheap prices. It appears the National Gallery in London took 17 specimens, the Irish National Gallery took 10 and the rest were sold at auction by Christies. As the *Building Chronicle* lamented: "It is quite evident that an application, backed by the Lord Provost and the Members for the City, would at once have been favourably responded to by government, who, indeed, would have gladly seized the opportunity of granting a favour at so trifling an expense...An opportunity has been lost sight of by the directors of our Scottish National Gallery, which might have tended to the improvement of the collection" (*Building Chronicle*, no. 37, April 1857: 189). Indeed the lack of German artists in the collection was quite glaring.

acquisition policy for the National Gallery based on the historical value of pictures until the second half of the century. By this time Victorian aesthetes had begun to espouse the advantageous effect on popular morality, humanity and civilisation of the art historical stratagem. Ruskin, in particular, came down in favour of hanging chronologically "on the line", fitting with his view of ornamentation in architecture. And as noted in chapter three, by the time of Sir Charles Eastlake's second period as director of the National Gallery from 1855-65, pictures from the Venetian, Roman, other Italian, Dutch, Flemish and Spanish schools had been kept distinct and displayed according to Dr Waagen's policies.

For all these reasons, then, the gallery at Edinburgh was organised loosely around two primitive categories - "Ancient Masters" and "British Artists", which effectively split the collection into ancient and modern works (there being very little of note in the "British School" that could be considered "ancient" or "masterly"). The inclination to make such a distinction in Edinburgh can be traced back to the arrangements of the Royal Institution galleries and to the memos of the National Gallery's curator, William Johnstone, to the Board in view of the gallery's opening. Within the Royal Institution galleries, the Board of Trustees, in May 1850, resolved to maintain "a more distinct separation between the Ancient and Modern pictures of the collections" (NG1/1/39). In effect, this meant putting the Torrie collection in the north octagon and Etty's modern historical pictures in the south octagon. It was believed that the effect of both suffered if hung too close. In particular, the curator had focused on the difference in tone between Old Masters (dark) and the modern pictures (light) which disharmonised them.

By 1858 this general principle of organisation had been transposed to the National Gallery and after some experimentation, a rudimentary hanging scheme had emerged. We can loosely reconstruct the initial configuration from Johnstone's memos to the Board, the first catalogue and from newspaper accounts on the gallery's opening.

## *ii) The Hanging Scheme*

"My dear Johnstone, How goes our the National Gallery? are your pictures yet arranged? are there any spaces of wall yet left?" (Letter from David Roberts to William Johnstone, December 14th 1858).



Figure 75: Interior of National Gallery of Scotland (detail) c. 1867-77, Anonymous

Perhaps the most striking difference a visitor today would have noticed of the National Gallery on its opening was the crowded mode of its arrangement. From all accounts the pictures covered the wall, virtually obliterating any trace of the bare planks. This was carpet-to-cornice hanging at its most extreme, making maximum use of the small space for the three hundred objects. Installation procedures certainly contrasted heavily with the more "pedagogical", ordered and evolutionary presentation on the continent. The "mixed hang" of the National Gallery of Scotland resembled much more the aristocratic schemes of the eighteenth century, where the overall effect was crucial. An urgency to keep the walls overflowing with pictures, frame to frame, pervaded the actions of the gallery's superintendents, and indicated the logistical juggling that was required to keep the jigsaw whole. Frequently, the gallery was forced to rearrange the ensemble in order to "fill up the blanks upon the walls" when pictures were loaned to other exhibitions in the Kingdom - the International Exhibition of 1862, in London, for instance (NG1/1/42). If no replacements were found in time, vacant sections of the walls were "filled up with dark red hangings" which "much improved the appearance of the Gallery" (NG1/1/43). Pictures were hung on the walls of the arches between the galleries and over the top of the arches, as high as the walls would allow.



Figure 76: Interior of National Gallery of Scotland (detail) c. 1867-77, Anonymous

Next door in the RSA suite of rooms, things appeared even more crowded. At times 850 pictures hung in virtually the same available space as the National Gallery, although temporary exhibitions such as the RSA's attracted smaller pictures (the walls of middle class town houses, where many of the pictures ended up, could probably not have taken large canvases).



Figure 77: The Great Exhibition Room, RSA Annual Exhibition, 1860

Conversely, many of the pictures in the National Gallery collection were inordinately large - the fifteen foot Ettys, the fifteen foot Terbrugghen, the thirteen foot Lauder, a seventeen foot Allan, the nine foot Van Dyck and so on. In fact, it had been forced upon



Johnstone to hang these large pictures first as it was "impossible to form any opinion as to where smaller pictures are to be placed, 'till these are put out of the way" (NG6/7/28).

#### a) Room I

If we can now take a progressive "walk" through the gallery, we will be in a position to focus on certain issues which pertain to the organisation, status and ethos of each room. In the light of the later foundation of the National Portrait Gallery in 1882 (opened in 1889), it is interesting to note that the whole of the first room had been dedicated to portraits. Indeed this room was often termed a "portrait gallery" in itself (NG6/7/28). The catalogue spoke of the importance of the recent decision to institute a National Portrait Gallery in London and alluded to a similar interest north of the border. Portraiture was always a very popular genre in Scotland and despite the fact that this was one of the smaller rooms in the gallery, the general effect of the thirty four pictures of Scottish figures, hung close, must have been impressive. Placed here were modern pictures by the likes of Thomas Lawrence, Henry Raeburn, Allan Ramsay, John Watson Gordon, Graham Gilbert, Colvin Smith, William Aikman, David Laing and John Runciman.

Portraiture, however, caused a problem which struck at the very heart of the Board of Trustees historical role in the encouragement of art in Scotland, as well as the position of the gallery itself. Such was the ambiguous aesthetic status of portraiture, which could range from the historically grand and ideal to the most vain, vulgar and technically deficient (Pointon, 1993), that the Board found itself increasingly stuck on the horns of a dilemma. What criteria should be used in deciding whether or not to accept and display a portrait? Should the historical importance (or celebrity status) of the sitter override the aesthetic or high artistic status of the picture? The problem arose every time the Board was offered a picture of a well-known figure, particularly if the character had connections with the Board itself. A set of resolutions was suggested to clarify matters of acquisition and other galleries in Britain were sounded for their policies. In the event, the Board was pressed into fully embracing its role as guardian of a high aesthetic by nominally rejecting portraits which fell outside the "principles upon which a National Gallery ought to be formed - which it was essential should be strictly confined in its

purposes to the encouragement of high art" (NG1/1/41). In other words, "none but works of artistic merit find a place in the National Gallery" (NG1/1/41). In subsequent years, many offers were deflected to the likes of Register House or the Industrial Museum where the sitter rather than the style or form constituted the valued object of perception.

Despite this concerted effort to retain an aesthetic purity to the gallery space, however, critics still found fault with the first room in the gallery. The reviewer for the *Scotsman* of April 2, 1859, for instance, spoke of the pictures by Ramsay, Runciman and Laing as well as others in this room as lacking in "sufficient merit as works of art to entitle them to a place in a National Gallery of Art, however well adapted they may be for a Portrait Gallery". Interestingly, the reviewer goes on to intimate the greater need for "A Holy Family by Raphael or even Beltraffie or a scene from the Tempest by Runciman". Portraiture, it seemed, did not lend itself so easily to aesthetic ideals. Often, its import was synonymous with historical or antiquarian tastes; interests which sat uneasily with those of high aesthetics; interests, in fact, which provided the later basis to the foundation of a separate portrait Gallery in Edinburgh.<sup>12</sup>

#### b) Room II

The visitor who moved into the second room, a more substantial octagon, would have encountered around forty pictures of the Flemish, Spanish and Italian schools which made up a substantial part of the Marquis of Abercorn's collection. This included two interiors by Panini, Velasquez's *Don Balthazar Carlos*, two pictures by Tintoretto, *The Marriage of St Catherine* by Albano, *The Adoration of the Magi* attributed at the time to Titian, but later revealed as a Bassano, and what the *Edinburgh Evening Courant* in March 1859 called "a very doubtful Rembrandt" (*Deposition from the Cross*).

The question of attribution was central to the Board's claims to display a representative, worthwhile and authentic collection. The trace of the signature or the

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<sup>12</sup> It would be inconceivable to think of any other genre that could be dedicated its own gallery. A National Gallery of still life? Something immanent to portraiture lends itself to separation and hence ambiguity.

expert's official sanction clearly made all the difference between a valorised object of aesthetic desire and a mere copy or derivative ("school of"). Hence objects of uncertain authorship, inasmuch as authorship was and is considered to be held down to one individuated "creator", posed a problem for the Board. On the one hand, the gallery could not make outlandish claims to the art world regarding its objects that could be subsequently revealed as specious or unfounded. On the other hand, and especially given the gallery's lack of specimens of the international canon, the trustees had to play on what it already had as a "National Gallery" with the cultural distinction that this label implied.

The tensions in this position were manifest on the revelation that the Board had taken at face-value the claims of dealers or patrons as to the history of the objects in the collection. The Board, in other words, could not itself guarantee the work's authenticity. In addition to the "Rembrandt" and the "Titian" mentioned above, doubt was also thrown over some of the other pictures in the Torrie collection.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, a reviewer went as far as to cast aspersions on the accuracy of the catalogue and, by implication, of the Board's professional credentials as an artistically cognizant national guardian of taste. "It is somewhat anomalous to find a national institution sheltering itself under such a declaration" suggested the critic in reference to the Board's acceptance of dealer authorship in the catalogue. He continued: "Whatever may be the reason for dealing so tenderly with the pictures already in the Gallery, we trust that both for the sake of art and truth the claims of future contributions will be carefully weighed before they are recorded under the names assigned to them by the donors". In a final comment on the need to avoid a vulgarised acquisition policy, the review concluded; "Not quantity but quality is wanted" (*Scotsman*, Saturday April 2 1859). All of which would have seriously affronted the Board's professional credo.

In response, the Board became more vigilant in verifying authenticity, especially

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<sup>13</sup> In 1860, for instance, Vandewelde's *Battle of Solebary* had been called into question by Wardlaw Ramsay in London, who suggested the label on the picture be stamped "unknown". The Board defended their attribution by pointing out that the picture "wasn't by the 'Great Vandewelde' but by his son who, in the catalogue, it is admitted 'only took to oil painting towards the end of his life and without any very great success'" (NG1/1/42). Nevertheless the Board was embarrassed enough to amend the label to indicate that the picture was by the lesser known artist.

with the older objects, using official catalogues and experts where possible. By the mid 1860s, on Johnstone's acquisition of some "Michaelangelo" wax models the Board was glad to produce certificates from specialists legitimating them as originals. They were later displayed in a worthy cabinet "in the best style" (NG1/1/43). And in 1859 a letter of attribution by "Mr Buchanan, author of the memoirs of Painting, 1824" verified "Rubens' Roman Charity" as of the hand of the master himself - as opposed to any of his "pupils".

The difference was paramount in conferring museological value on art; signed objects became fetishized objects - rare and luminous. The gallery's labels would have helped to secure a plethora of meanings relating to authenticity, legacy, ownership and taxonomy. They conveyed standard information for British galleries, including subject, name of artist, date of birth and date of death. Yet, on designating a picture as the work of a master, a label would have invited the visitor (where possible) to "read" a more powerful set of connotations into the work-as-fetish. It is to this extent that a label operates as a "system of classification" that in Jordanova's words, "confers value and status, and thereby constructs a setting for the item" (1989: 24). This principle of individuation may at first sight appear to contradict the presentation of the collection as an aggregate. But the combination of universalism and particularism, of form and content was at the very heart of the gallery's logic; as it was of modernity as a broader project. It was a matter of displaying the dual principles of totality and uniqueness; of the creator/painting and "art" as an organic system.

### c) The Cabinet-sized Octagon

In the absence of key examples from the international canon, the Board were on the constant look-out for ways to supplement the gaps. The procurement of sixty three of J. F. Lewis' watercolour copies of Old Masters from European museums (including Titian, Velasquez, Rubens, Veronese, Giorgione, Murillo, Rembrandt, Watteau, Van Dyck) fulfilled such a function. In the catalogue, the studies were said to "exemplify, as it were, in a condensed manner, the more striking peculiarities of the Venetian, Spanish, Dutch and Flemish schools" (EUL: I\*15/2.6:78). They were placed in the small cabinet-



sized octagon that was entered via the second room. This small octagon appeared to act rather as an ancillary space for less worthy, original or "awkward" specimens, including Reinagle's copy of Rubens *Crucifixion* and Urquhart's copy of Raphael's *Transfiguration*. The fact that Lewis' drawings were in watercolour (as opposed to the more "weighty" oil) and were copies clearly made them less consecrated. Nine drawings by Tourny from Fra Angelico's *Coronation of the Virgin* were also kept here, as were other pictures "after" an original master.

Further, the room's obscurity helped to deal with art which appeared to offend delicate, official Victorian morality. In its depiction of the moment after St John had been beheaded, Feti's *Decollation of St John the Baptist* (now attributed to Terbrugghen) was one of the only "originals" to be relegated to the room.

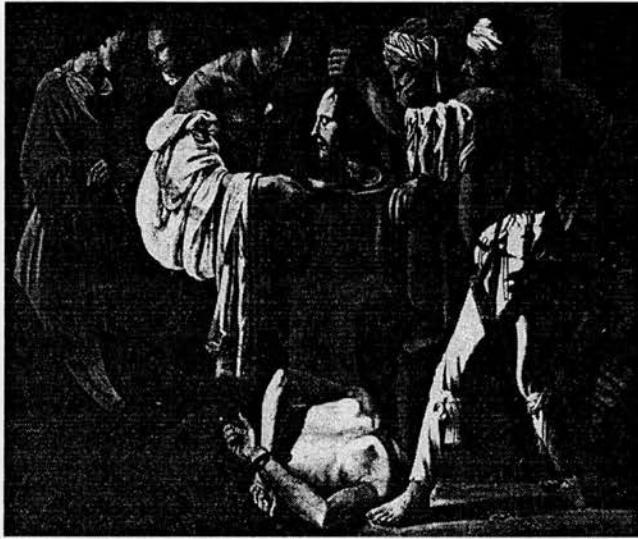


Figure 78: *Decollation of St. John Baptist*, Hendrick Terbrugghen

Seemingly, if the picture had represented the moment before the decollation, as it had with Etty's *Judith and Holofernes* or Van Dyck's *St Sebastian*, its repugnance would have been attenuated. As it stood, the "Feti" fell into the category of Old Masters who, while admired in the "excellence of their art" were denigrated for "the horrible details of suffering they have chosen to represent" (EUL: I\* 15/2.6:78).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The room's relative isolation also made it less visible to the curators. In the Board's view, the room was therefore at greater risk from the "careless or mischievous visitor" and it was logical

#### d) Room III - The Centre Octagon

Perhaps rather surprisingly, the biggest and most focal space of the gallery was given over to "modern pictures". The centre octagon, from which the rest of the collection branched and balanced out, displayed around fifty five late eighteenth and early nineteenth century pictures of "British Artists". These were mainly RSA diploma pictures of the likes of Sir William Allan, D. O. Hill, E. T. Crawford, William Simson, J. F. Williams, Alexander Nasmyth and Thomas Duncan; as well as some of the notable artists of England - Lawrence, Reynolds, Wilson, Gainsborough and Etty. In effect, the centre-piece was little more than an extra forum for the RSA, containing its most valued products and major purchases, and indicating the literal degree to which the Academy's interests lay at the *heart* of the gallery's evolution.



Figure 79: *Christ Teacheth Humility*, Robert Scott Lauder, 1847

To the extent that four of Etty's massive "historical pictures" were displayed in this room - and inasmuch as this class of painting was highly valued for its grand aspirations - the

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to dispose less valuable works here (NG6/7/28).



"contemporary" inflection may have been tempered in the minds of the Board. Etty's associations with Thomas Lawrence, his use of Old Masters and his depictions of mythological and biblical scenes made him an artist valued for his technical and moral virtues. Nevertheless, the modern patina of this room was inescapable. Robert's *Rome*, Lauder's *Christ Teaching Humility*, Harvey's *Columbus*, Noel Paton's *Quarell* and *Reconciliation of Oberon and Titania*, James Drummond's *Porteous Mob*, *Inverlochy Castle* by McCulloch, and landscapes by John Thomson of Duddingston, were all hung here, and inclined the space to resemble the centre octagon of the eastern suite during exhibition season.



Figure 80: *The Porteous Mob*, James Drummond, 1855

The decision to dedicate the centre octagon to the modern in this way appeared to rest on practical grounds, although the practical is never untouched by the ideological in these matters. In his memo to the Board of December 1858, William Johnstone focused on the peculiar size and nature of the central octagon, with its high walls and high skylights. For the curator, the tonal distribution of the room did not make it conducive to pictures hung

on the line because the light had further to reach. As a result, many of the ancient pictures, it was declared, which were dark in tone (the Van Dyck's were mentioned in particular), but had to be hung on the line because of their size, would "not be seen so well in the centre room as in any of the other octagons" (NG6/7/28).

On the other hand, good light was in evidence at higher levels upon the walls, where modern works in temporary exhibitions were accustomed to reside. In fact, in the RSA side, Johnstone pointed out, it had "always been found necessary in order to prevent the centre octagon having a base appearance to hang there one row more of pictures". Evidently, then, the desire to cover the walls of this room tapestry-style was a safeguard against an adulteration of the overall effect of the collection; a fear indicated in Johnstone's later comment that he doubted there be enough ancient objects to make a selection of pictures to fill up the centre octagon, in which case "the general effect of the galleries would be marred" (NG6/7/28).

The anomalies inherent in the example of a National Gallery where centre-stage had been dedicated to recent works (and especially where similar works were exclusively shown for three months of the year next door) I am sure were not lost on the Trustees. The curator's explanation of the room's modern intonation had been prefaced by a statement of defence which stipulated that nothing like a "preference" had been given to the modern pictures. The order, it was said, arose out of "necessity" and of the need to "add to the general appearance of the galleries" (NG6/7/28). Indeed, without the capacity to parade a comprehensive historical assemblage, the Board was somewhat pressed to make good of what they had; and what they had in abundance was the fruit of a flowering academy at the height of its powers.

As far as public reaction was concerned, the Board had no need for concern. Little untoward was reported in the press concerning this distribution. In fact, the modern collection had been praised for the decent light thrown on some choice pictures and for the very opportunity to see such works brought together in one room. For a middle class public who had cut their aesthetic teeth on RSA exhibitions and particularly the realist/romantic landscape idiom (of which, incidentally, just under half comprised the composition of this room), a predisposition towards modern works was understandable.



Perhaps there was less inherent in Old Masters that was able to engage the typical gallery-goer - the detail, the locality, the realism. Certainly the grand historical pictures and the ideal classical landscapes would have been less appealing to this constituency. (Dutch and Flemish, of course, retained their popularity throughout).

Finally, it would be useful to mention the "national" nuances implied in the centre octagon. Around fifty of the artists whose works were disposed in the room were considered "Scottish" and therefore "national painters". There is uncertainty as to the precise meaning of the category "Scottish art" at this time, as in the catalogue's claim that David Allan, the eighteenth century genre painter "was the first in Scotland who imparted to it a national feeling, and introduced the style that Wilkie followed out so successfully" (EUL: I\* 15/2.6:78:60); or that Wilkie himself rejected the grand and ideal in favour of "the simplest of national styles, which, however, he elevated to a higher point than any former artist had carried it" (EUL: I\* 15/2.6:78:99). But, clearly, the sense in which an obdurate and ancient tradition of Scottish art had been constituted by the early twentieth century - with deep structures and essences, philosophical modalities and preoccupations and national aesthetic threads and forms - was not in evidence in the mid nineteenth century. In fact, "national" when related to art appeared not as a deep immanence but as a more or less coherent set of themes or subjects. Surface concerns arose especially in the depiction of Scottish characters in genre scenes or of Scottish portraits (portraits *of* Scottish people rather than portraits *in* a national style); and in scenes from Scott, Burns and Scotland's religious history. All of which returns us to popularity, locality and the middle class exhibition-goer's proclivity to favour the modern over the ancient.

As to the latent claims regarding the import of Scottish painters in the canon, nothing explicitly was done to connect the evolution of great art or of ancient masters to a consummation in Scottish art. Waagen and Schinkel's maxim that a gallery should show "national painters who are at the same time great artists...as completely as possible" (Seling, 1967) did not, and could not materialise in Edinburgh. The centre octagon tended to stand on its own - a collection within a collection that made no claims to summation. And the catalogue, rather than extolling the virtues of the great and coherent "Scottish School" within historical civilisation, tended to establish points of derivation

and influence from the English and continental schools. Hence, John Thomson's manner was based on that of Poussin as well as the Dutch Masters, Patrick Gibson "painted landscape compositions based on the style of Claude and Poussin" (EUL:I\*15/2.6:78:71); Raeburn's style was modelled on Reynolds'; and other artists were considered "British" rather than "Scottish" *tout court*.

In no sense could the gallery be held to circulate an iconography of national glorification via the workings of its texts and visual installations. In keeping with its socio-genesis, and its twice removedness from the continental model, the iconographic programme was modest, straightforward, rational and professional; based in civic interests and factional struggles rather than state power and political upheaval.

#### e) Rooms IV and V

Having alluded to the public's possible inclination towards the modern, local and familiar in art, not too much should be made of the disinclination towards ancient pictures. The centre octagon was only one room out of six, after all; and the two remaining rooms left for us to investigate were more or less wholly given over to ancient pictures. I shall deal with them together, but through two separate themes - "museofication" and the social differentiation of art perception.

These last two rooms, then, contained what was left of the collection. Room IV, a substantial octagon, was dedicated to the pictures collected by the Royal Institution before its accounts were wound up - the three important Van Dycks and sixteenth/eighteenth Venetian pictures, in particular. Room V, a less sizeable room, contained the Torrie collection - a mix of Dutch, Flemish, French and Italian pictures as well as thirty five marbles/bronzes. As the final space in the gallery, however, other pictures which did not fit elsewhere had ended up in this room. In particular, some RSA studies, Wilkie's unfinished *John Knox dispensing the Sacrament* and Etty's large historical picture, *The Combat*, were disposed here. The latter, rather fittingly, was hung on the most southerly wall, signifying the gallery's final barrier and affecting a kind of spatial reign over the gallery from the south. Walking through the arches, all visitors would have been able to see the picture. This was apt because the picture seemed to

recapitulate, in condensed form, the very essence of the gallery's ambiguous and fragmented genesis.

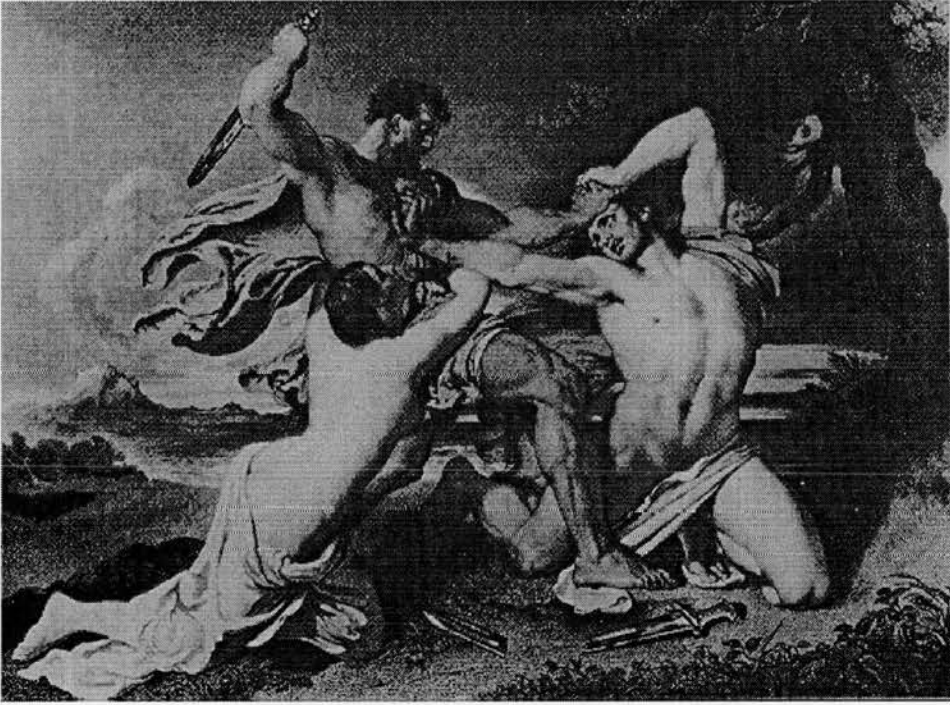


Figure 81: *The Combat*, William Etty, 1825

*The Combat* was a modern picture painted in the historical, allegorical style. Etty was an English artist but who had been taken up by the dominant artistic faction in Edinburgh, the Royal Scottish Academy, as a particularly virtuous figure. Not naturally talented but sound in judgment in the Academy's eyes, Etty represented a noble branch of painting to which Reynolds himself subscribed. It was hoped that Etty's pictures would be the catalyst for inspiring the production of high-brow, grand manner pictures in the historical style in Edinburgh. But this style could never take off for reasons already noted: it was disengaged from the concerns of middle class patrons; Edinburgh never had the grand aristocracy of the eighteenth century to support the genre; and relatedly, the technical training of Scotland's artists was not sufficient to undertake history painting. Etty, then, symbolised the combination of modern and historical forces in the formation of the collection; of the official English and civic Scottish impulses that framed the distribution of its control, and to the unrealistic aristocratic aspirations that Edinburgh was sometimes prone to (and experienced as a loss), but which was quickly tempered by bourgeois

rationality. The placement of this picture at the southern head of the gallery, in other words, could not have been more fitting.

iii) *"Museofication" in the National Gallery*

"A Museum only begins when what is individual resolves into a new whole" (Hauser 1982: 498)

Returning to the content of these two rooms as a whole, it is of interest to note the quantity of objects whose origins lay within a context far-removed from that of the museum; whose organic function was certainly not to be collected, framed, labelled and hung in a way that signified its existence as an object of artistic inspection. On this realisation, it is apt to ask to what extent the gallery itself worked to resocialise its objects and why. How did acquisitions come to play a totally different role to that for which they had been originally assigned? And what does this say about the power of the space and the context in the conferral of value in the case of the gallery and its art?

To begin with, it may be useful to outline the nature of these objects and whence they sprung. Without going into too much detail it is enough to reveal the possible circumstances under which many of the National Gallery's acquisitions in Rooms IV and V originally "worked".

Firstly, many of the smaller pictures in the Torrie collection, especially from the seventeenth century "Dutch school", were "cabinet pictures". That is to say, they were originally intended to fit into plain, domestic or intimate bourgeois interiors and to be viewed at close range. Even if, as is likely, these pictures were hung low down in Room V for close inspection (the less detailed and larger old masters would have been placed higher) the organic connection to primary utility was immediately negated.

Secondly, decorative works were abundant in the rooms. Many of the classical landscapes after Claude or Poussin would have been fitted up to match the feel of a seventeenth or eighteenth century country house or palace. Their utility in a spatial scheme would have been subsumed under ideas of decorative or ornamental sentiment, not under statements on the stature of the seventeenth century French landscape school. The fact that some of the pictures in the National Gallery had been previously cut down



suggests the extent to which they were formerly treated akin to wallpaper. Tiepolo's "Finding of Moses" (Room IV), for instance, an eighteenth century fantasy piece with wooded landscape, was said to have been a decorative composition and has been both cut down at the top and separated from a large section from the right hand side which belonged to a separate collector until recently. (In addition, the same artist's "Meeting of Anthony and Cleopatra" in Room II, was a sketch for a fresco for a Venetian palace).



Figure 82: *The Finding of Moses*, Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, c. 1738-40

Closely related to decoration was personal glorification and many of the portraits in the collection were certainly meant as presents, mementos or objects of vanity; and often as part of a series of works. The 1957 catalogue, for instance, reports that Van Dyck's "Italian Noble" was one of a pair of portraits in the Palace of Giacomo Gentili which Wilkie later saw "fitted into the wall" of a room in a Palazzo Lomellini. And one of the Flemish landscapes was affirmed to be one of "four panels representative of the periods of the day painted by Titian to decorate the bedstead of the Emperor Charles V, which was in the possession of the Vivaldi Pasqua family" (1957: 86).

Finally, a large proportion of these works were religious and originally located in a suitable environment - churches, temples, monasteries and palaces. Pordenone's

*Christ on the Mount of Olives*, for instance, like others of this cultural worker, may have been either for a cycle of religious pictures for an Italian cathedral, for a decorative project or for palatial glory. *The Last Supper* by Bonifazio was originally from a Carthusian monastery of San Andrea de Lido. "Michaelangelo's" wax models were from the tombs of the Medici's from San Lorenzo, Florence. And in 1862 the Board borrowed from the National Gallery, London, an altarpiece "with cuspidi or points and side pilasters" containing 18 pictures on wood, some attributed to Andrea del Castagna (NG1/1/42). This came from the convent of St. John the Evangelist at Prato Vecchio in the Casenlino, Florence. Clearly, all of these objects would have formerly played spiritual, devotional, or decorative roles that were stripped on entry to the gallery.

And yet this is exactly what the project of the museum was about - extracting objects from their veridical settings and turning them into museum pieces. It was about establishing meaningful connections between disparate objects like altar pieces and modern pictures such that they begin to denote a similar sign - "art", with canonised figures "artists". (As Fyfe writes, "it is Leonardo's Virgin to which the museum directs attention rather than the mother of Christ" (1993: 14)). It was about making a nominally public display piece out of an entity that may have only been for select eyes. It was about resocialising, objectifying and fetishising cultural monads as symbols of a higher reality. It was about cutting up the world into categories, periods and schools in order to provide a "cultural cohesion of dominant styles" (Sherman and Rogoff, 1994: xi). In short, it was about the (re)presentation of objects via space and its attendants.

On entry and display, cultural works drastically transmuted; they were now "framed" by the building, art history, the collection, the frame itself, the label, in a way that invited visitors (if they could) to perceive the object as a secular cultural triumph of humanity. Images that in isolation or out of context may have disturbed the sensitivities of (Victorian) morality could receive a public airing in the museum because this was a sanctioned environment. In Scotland, at least, the National Gallery must have been one of the only "public" institutions where one could see naked flesh without incurring the

wrath of Protestant admonition.<sup>15</sup> To this extent, "Museofication" was a complex process of transformation that was central to the overall epistemology of the National Gallery and to the meaning of its contents. All the gallery's materials were active in shaping a certain receptivity and of transfiguring the works that, particularly in Rooms IV and V, were never meant to end up there. Despite limitations in its collection, its modest iconography and its mixed hang, the National Gallery space provided certain conditions for opening up the surface of the picture to the "contemplative gaze", giving a possible sense of direct contact with the artist and the act of creation.

#### *iv) The "naive" and the "educated" in the National Gallery*

"The naive 'beholder' differs from the art historian in that the latter is conscious of the situation" (Panofsky, cited in Bourdieu, 1993 :218).

But as Bourdieu does, we must ask whose gaze this was. If professionalism had stripped the gallery of all that was superfluous to efficient display, leaving a space dedicated to disinterested and refined cultural pleasures and aesthetic knowledge, whose socio-ocular dispositions did this favour? Like other galleries, the National Gallery of Scotland's context worked to differentiate viewing publics by establishing a level of cultural capital that was required to play the game of informed appreciation. A hierarchy of perception was implicated, in other words, in the way the gallery set out its collection, in the quality of its "texts" and the codes of behaviour enforced by the trustees. A basic line of distinction was implied between the educated middle class - those equipped with the requisite aesthetic disposition (*habitus*) and the "naive" or "uneducated" who could be physically present but made to feel obviated or at least could not operate at the levels of perception that were valorised in the gallery.

Apart from the varying gallery times themselves, (with, in "descending" order, but with increasing consternation on the Board's count; private views, sixpence days, copy days and free days), one way in which such a hierarchy can be unveiled is by looking at the catalogue. Sold at sixpence, the one hundred page catalogue was significant to the

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<sup>15</sup> There were many "nudes" in the gallery including *Mars and Venus* by Veronese, *Madonna, infant and St John*, by Guercino, *Venus and Adonis* by Veronese and *Ecce Homo* by Guido.



visit. It provided a historical description of the pictures and their authors as well as critical remarks on particular styles and schools. By appearing to summarise the collection and its import, the catalogue appeared to stand outside it; a neutral text of iteration and knowledge that presented the same face to all. Yet, on investigation, the catalogue was an ideologically active text which differentiated subject positions, reinforcing divisions between the cognizant and the untaught.

The Board's attitude to catalogues had been revealed in 1854 to the Royal Institution for the Encouragement of Fine Arts whose collection of Old Masters and modern pictures in the Royal Institution galleries had been accompanied by a plush, high-quality catalogue. On the one hand, in keeping with its historical role as art educator, its challenge to the narrow privacy of the old aristocratic faction, and in response to pressures from London, the Board wrote to the Royal Institution asking them to reduce the existing price which was "quite out of the reach of the working classes". "To such persons" the Board observed, the ownership of a catalogue was "a pleasing recollection of the Exhibition they had seen and by shewing it to their friends might be a means of exciting an interest in the Exhibition and of making it more widely known and appreciated" (NG1/3/27). On the other hand, and fitting with its increasingly specialised and professionalised role as guardian of fine art, the Board suggested keeping the present high quality stock for the "higher classes", who would prefer to pay the higher price for it "for the sake of obtaining that superior printing and style of this catalogue which make it *the best for reference in viewing the pictures*" (NG1/3/27, my emphasis).

The educated middle and upper classes were offered a superior set of cultural references because this satisfied their socially accumulated hunger for aesthetic works. "But common people" wrote the Board, "*would be satisfied with much less*" (ibid., my emphasis) and a restricted, inferior catalogue was produced for this social constituency. Those who probably needed as much assistance to reception as possible were given a cheap, Spartan experience which reinforced their inability to "play the game". In fact, the *Scotsman* had intimated that the minimal information conveyed by the label (subject, name, date of birth/death) would have been enough for such visitors "who are contented with these particulars [and] need not incur the expense of a catalogue" (Saturday, April



2, 1859).

This was the operation of a "cultural arbitrary" (Fyfe, 1993) that functioned to reinstate the divisions between the aesthetic of a cultured middle class and that of the working class, the stranger or the uneducated. The latter were registered in the gallery but in a way which subordinated their presence and subject position. Primacy was given to the cultivated gaze that could delve under the surface of the pictures, that could decipher the invisible codes and make them coherent, that could place works and artists into recognisable movements, schools and styles.

So, the educated eye was a source of visual power and observation that could animate the gallery's objects and meet the demands made by the spatial-aesthetics of the gallery. This included the knowledge base or artistic competence needed to use the catalogue in the sense demanded. Schools, movements and styles were discussed as if the reader was familiar with their definitions. The "Bolognese School", the "Venetian School", "Mannerism", "the Picturesque", "the Eclectic School", "the Spanish School", "the Flemish School" were all listed without explanation (or without proper separation in the gallery of course). There was "truth and simplicity of treatment" in Bassano, whose greens "had a kind of vitreous sparkling appearance"; Giorgione's "pictures bear the impress of great power and have a luminousness and internal glow contrasted with a solemn and dignified repose"; Bonifazio's "style is broad and simple, and in colour he nearly approaches Titian"; Bordone "looked much at the works of Giorgione"; Ostade's "pictures have great depth and transparency, produced by an unctuous mode of working, exactly the opposite of Teniers"; and in Tiepolo "an intelligent art student may...find technical qualities of manipulation, texture and colour, from which benefit may be derived" (EUL, I\* 15/2.6). On British artists the catalogue was slightly less lofty and polysyllabic. Greater description was given over to historical events, recognisable subjects, details on costumes and so on. But overall, the catalogue was geared towards the informed visitor and a technology of seeing that fell in with the middle class *habitus*.

Thus, at the level of knowledge, the national gallery was patterned according to an intertextual or relational system of comparisons and differences. Consider the following typical statement in the catalogue: "Guido...displayed more originality in his

works than any other pupil of the Caracci, and was the great opponent of Caravaggio, and the naturalisti of that period, aiming at lightness in his colouring and elegance in his forms" (EUL, I\* 15/2.6). A visitor could only make sense of this knowledge if s/he was possessed of the codes of classification, the stylistic indices, the generic codes, that made it possible to differentiate the "naturalisti" from "Caracci" and "Caravaggio" and apprehend the meaning of "lightness" and "elegance" in painting. Without these codes there merely exists a cacophony of indecipherables - words, lines, colours that refuse to cohere into a system. In this case, visitors feel displaced, precluded, "out of their depth" (Bourdieu, 1993: 225). In the absence of a historical hang even chronology was omitted as a possible precept of organisation for the uninitiated. In short, nothing in the morphology of the gallery made it easy for this constituency of visitor.

#### **E: Layer Four: Codes And Modes Of Conduct**

"A picture gallery appears to be thought of as a fair, whereas what it should be is a temple, a temple where, in silent and unspeaking humility and in inspiring solitude, one may admire artists as the highest among mortals" (Tieck and Wackenroder, cited in Hudson, 1987 :43).

"Why Edinburgh?...because a clean ideal sphere of judgment was being constructed and defined in terms of a low and dirty periphery, a notional and literal 'outside' which guaranteed a coherence and privilege to the 'inside'" (Stallybrass and White, 1986: 109).

Finally, we come to our last layer of signification subtending the national gallery's ensemble of socio-spatial relations. Working coterminously with the above three layers of museum effect were the informal rules, regulations and codes that stipulated the kinds of behaviour expected in the gallery. Normatively inscribed forms of conduct became integral to the mode by which the gallery regulated its space. Indeed, most museums had formal regulations or proscribed rules for dealing with the public. As Sherman notes, the Louvre issued instructions "fraternally to invite citizens to move along" (1987: 51) before 1793, and other continental museums recruited guards to prevent visitors touching works of art, to suppress unruly or drunken behaviour, and to deny access to those accompanied by dogs! This was clearly part of the attempt to mark off the gallery space, like its antecedents in the bourgeois public sphere, as a realm of cultural distinction and

contemplation. Conditions of consumption had to reflect the reservation of the gallery site for a quality experience, divested of vulgarity and the pleasures of the low orders. Hence, rules against spitting, swearing, fighting, eating, drinking and so on, served to expel the values of the fair and the tavern, leaving instead a pure space of etiquette and eminence.

On its opening, the National Gallery of Scotland had no set of formal regulations from which we can extract a clear-cut operation of purifications and exclusions. But what we do find is the existence of certain decisions and statements on the gallery's visitors and the organisation of the visiting space, from which certain assumptions on its audience can be drawn. In particular, it is possible to look at the gallery's position on security arrangements, and on the Board's reaction to certain events or accidents which disrupted the refined and respectable space, as coded incidents of an informal set of prohibitions. This indexed the same ideo-logics which served to distinguish those who "naturally" felt at ease in the gallery and obeyed its rules without thinking, from those who were less congruent with the codes, and who were often posed as a threat to the gentility of the space.

First of all, then, the question of access - who was and was not welcomed into the gallery - remained a thorny question for the Board. Inasmuch as the national gallery was a nominally public institution, the Board found itself confronting the possibility of having to welcome visitors of all classes, ages, temperaments and states of sobriety. Indeed, part of the movement to elevate the taste and behaviour of both Scotland's industrial class and its "drunken denomination" to a level less commensurate with radicalism, intemperance or "idleness", found occasional expression in the encouragement of such constituencies into the gallery. In the 1850s and 60s, for instance, the Board accepted requests from the Society of the Suppression of Drunkenness and the Campsie Mechanics Institute to attend the galleries under the supervision of the Board. That the Board was not totally at ease with such visits is indicated by its condition that policemen and security guards be in greater attendance. This went also for public holidays when the gallery could be visited by those who ordinarily worked during opening hours. In fact, in a fit of pique the Board complained to the police that unless more officers were given

at their disposal on public holidays, the National Gallery would not be able to open at all, as "the articles in the collections are to be exposed to injury from disorderly visitors" (NG1/1/44). On private views when similar numbers had attended the galleries, of course, no such recourse was needed in the Board's view; a less troublesome audience was implied on such occasions.

A suspicion of the popular, profane and boisterous appeared to be a defining characteristic of the Trustees' regulation of the gallery space. The possible inclusion of the "masses", inasmuch as they did partake of the opportunity, gave itself to caution for the potential escape of transgressive, disruptive or "eccentric" behaviour which might undermine the respectable foundations of the space. Guards were asked to be particularly vigilant against the touching of pictures and the entrance staff of the Royal Institution galleries warned against "persons trying to get admission [who] are not quite sober, and troublesome" (NG1/3/28). By the Board's own directives, "disorderly visitors" were to be checked and "misconduct" suppressed by the police, who were constantly drafted in by the Board (NG1/2/28); while officers were empowered to "refuse admittance to suspicious characters" (NG1/1/44).

Precisely because the gallery had been carved out as a space of rank, hierarchy and professional regulation, that body of the unpalatable "other" had to be either kept distant or controlled. The image potential of the low and transgressive was enough to spark the Board into marginalising the order and visibility of this constituency as feasibly as a public gallery would allow. Indeed, eliminating or distancing the rude, the dirty, the primal and the venal was a defining moment for Europe's bourgeois. For, as Stallybrass and White (1986) indicate, the fear and subsequent representation of elements of the "Great Unwashed" - the sewer, the rat, the prostitute, the contagious - a fear which, paradoxically, returned in sublimated ways as desire and fascination, marked out the boundaries between the high and low that collectivised and purified the former. By stipulating that drunks, criminals and suspicious visitors were kept in check the Board was merely acting out the historical role that the civilisation process had instilled in this class, raising the stakes of manners and codes of conduct in such a way that mapped the



cultural primacy of the bourgeois subject onto the space of contemplation.<sup>16</sup>

The gallery, in other words, had become an index of what Stallybrass and White have called the "great labour of bourgeois culture" (1986: 93), the attempt to discursively and symbolically territorialise a space "separate from the court and the church on the one hand and the market square, alehouse, street and fairground on the other" (1986: 93-4). This was a space with refined laws and protocols of behaviour and language like the theatre, the law court, the library, and the drawing room, that embodied a "subliminal elitism" (1986: 202) through which the bourgeois class, especially in countries like Scotland with its Protestant morality of clean living, marked itself as salubrious, distinctive and superior.

We might look at the question of the inclusion/exclusion of children and infants, for instance, as a test of the Board's intolerance of the spontaneous, unpredictable and "crude". In the Board's view, the child represented a potentially promiscuous constituency in the gallery; it was still at a "rude" stage of social development that could be dirty, visceral and noisy. By the mid 1860s complaints were registered from the curator who suggested that "all children under 4 years of age should be excluded" (NG1/1/43). The proposition was rejected but, interestingly, "Babies in arms" were excluded. Presumably the possible disruption caused by the holding of a baby, in the eyes of the Board, was lessened if the baby was cot-ridden (the risk of the infant's touch, or bodily fluids, were lessened if it was confined in this way). In effect, of course, this would have served to interdict those working class mothers who could not afford such amenities.

Moreover, by 1866 an edict had been issued to limit the admission of boys and girls under 10 years of age unless accompanied by an adult, "as in many instances children got into the gallery who were not fit to be there without being superintended" (NG1/1/43). This time the curator had explained that children were more prone to behaviour unbecoming of the civility of the gallery. They wanted to "ascertain the

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<sup>16</sup> "For even if the bourgeoisie could establish the purity of their own gaze, the stare of the urban poor themselves was rarely felt as one of deference and respect. On the contrary, it was more frequently seen as an aggressive and humiliating act of physical contact" (Stallybrass and White, 1986: 135).

surface" of pictures and "serious damage might result from similar caresses". No such damage ever did result. In fact, the Board always seemed to over-estimate the threat of the popular and transgressive and were genuinely surprised when it was revealed that no injury had been done to pictures, that visitors were orderly and that the gallery had remained intact! But this did not stop the Board from taking further measures to guard the pictures by placing a guard rope around them "so as to make it more effective for keeping off children" (NG1/1/44). And the Board's antipathy to dirt, as well as its desire to subject the "unruly" to discipline and public regulation was evident in the curator's observation of the "hands of ragged little boys and girls" who he then pointed out to the assistant curator "as to be specially looked after" (NG6/7/29).<sup>17</sup>

Still, the pictures remained a constant security scare for the Board. Guards were increasingly ordered to keep watch and suppress any physical tendencies. But additional measures were required for some pictures.



Figure 83: *The Quarrel of Oberon and Titania*, Sir Joseph Noel Paton, 1849

<sup>17</sup> Mention can be made, here, of an act of profanation which fuelled this particular ire against the "infantile other". In 1858, the keeper of the Royal Institution and National Gallery buildings was presented to the police accompanied by "two bags of stones picked off the roof of those Buildings after a very recent cleaning". The stones were allegedly thrown by "mischievous lads and boys who break a quantity of glass and do other such damage by such reckless conduct". The police were called in to take steps against this behaviour but nothing more was reported of the matter (NG1/3/30).

By the mid 1860s it was revealed that Noel Paton's *Quarell* and *Reconciliation of Oberon and Titania* attracted much attention of an extrinsic nature. The detail in the pictures must have been a particular source of fascination for visitors, depicting as they did, the fantastical minutiae of lizards, plants, snails, foliage, spiders, and sprites from Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream". The issue had already become a dilemma for the Board in the late 1850s when labels had been attached to the same pictures in the Royal Institution galleries by the curator, asking visitors not to touch. This had been carried out behind the Board's back and was followed by admonishment to the curator involved.

The Board's discomfort, here, hinged on the fact that it did not want to appear to distrust a public it had welcomed by intimating such a behaviour. For the bourgeois public at least, this was all supposed to have gone without saying. Overt labels, on this count, "would be *unbecoming in the National Gallery*" and anyway, were "not usual in the great National Galleries of Europe" (NG1/3/28, my emphasis). On the other hand, the Board still had to safeguard its objects and discourage "recklessness towards fine works of art" (NG1/3/28). Touching pictures, in other words, had to be put down. So increased vigilance was stressed with regard to Paton's pictures and guards were instructed to prevent any inclination towards corporeal involvement beyond the ocular and contemplative.<sup>18</sup> This reiterated the ideals of the civilised *habitus*, to control the boundaries of the body - touching, eating, defecating, spitting, expelling mucus - (Elias, 1978-82) and to keep the socially inadmissible in check. Corporeal occlusion, for instance, was surely the basis to the Board's tragi-comic decision to cancel copying tickets for a Mr Weiss who "being subject to epileptic fits" appeared both to alarm visitors and "endangered any works of art he might be near" (NG1/1/44): while its later decision to cover the two Paton pictures with glass was an additional safeguard against tactile promiscuity (NG1/1/43).

The issue of behaviour, however, was not always confined to visitors. The National Gallery's own guards were obviously a crucial feature of the gallery's

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<sup>18</sup> Drummond's *Porteous Mob* was also singled out as drawing unwelcome attention.



respectability. Their behaviour had both to reflect control and decorum; when it did not the Board had particular cause for concern. In 1868 a confrontation between a guard and a visitor from Ireland ended in the Board having to reprimand its staff and apologise to the individual involved. The visitor had entered the gallery after paying his entry fee, but no pass or ticket had been issued, it being 10 minutes before closing. On being confronted by a guard inside, the visitor could not produce evidence of legitimate entry and was thus threatened with eviction. According to the Board's own minutes, "being of impestuous temper and feeling himself, as he truly was, insulted, an altercation ensued *not creditable to the gallery or its management*" (NG1/3/33, my emphasis). The fact that this was a "sixpence day" and the visitor was a "gentleman" gave added embarrassment to the Board and its usually urbane, hushed and genteel space. At such moments the Board was involved in a struggle to retain its dignity, central to which was a need to render itself distinctive to others who visited the gallery of a similar distinction.

Finally, the strengthening of a silent mode of contemplation, inoffensive, graceful and dignified, was always one of the main aims of the Board of Trustees. To the extent that sound always works interdependently with space, hush appeared as a defining component of the gallery's interior. The physical parameters of sound, the rhythms and circulations of silence, most probably penetrated the gallery's spatial materiality, as it did in museums, theatres, concerts and libraries throughout Britain.<sup>19</sup> Indeed the gallery's carpet had been avowed as an integral facilitator of quietude; it banished the "constant footfalls of visitors" that was "extremely irritating to those desiring the calm and contemplative study of art" (NG6/6/16). It is likely, in addition, that the progressive expulsion of young children turned on matters of noise, the crying of babies in particular. Infantile disturbances threatened the gallery's ability to deliver distinction and impaired the professional rectitude that had been so carefully layered *vis-a-vis* the neo-classical building, the decor and the gallery's "texts".

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<sup>19</sup> The problem, here, is the lack of any definitive descriptions of the gallery from the position of the viewer. I am presuming a degree of silence based on the Board's own statements on the carpet and on recognised conditions found in similar "ceremonial" institutions, even today.





Figure 84: St Mary's Wynd, from the Pleasance, drawn by T. H. Shepherd

In contrast to the hubbub and conviviality of popular pleasures and street spectacles, then, the National Gallery elevated a dormant specular concentration that again petrified divisions between the naive and the informed visitor. On the one hand, like neo-classicism, silence fitted well with the *habitués* of the latter. The domestic gentility of the New Town drawing room, the theatre, the church and other places of bourgeois assembly in the city, presupposed an ability, at designated moments, to suppress coarse laughter or noisy participation and assume a refined bodily deportment of hushed humility. On the other hand, the popular proclivity for filling up space with noise, the laughter of carnival and the verbosity of folk sociation - idioms, gestures and symbols that signposted the wynds of Edinburgh's Old Town and the markets of its High Street; such a tendency was at odds with the gallery's solemnity. Silence, a pre-requisite in most galleries of Europe, was not only golden, but genteel and hegemonic.



Figure 85: *Princes Street from the Mound*, Charles Halkerston, 1843. This shows the panorama rotunda and Wombwell's travelling menagerie displaced by the National Gallery early in the next decade

In a broader sense, at the gallery's scene of reception, the popular-transgressive was a literal target for expulsion. In 1863 the Board of Trustees was pressed into writing to the police to take steps to ban disruptive performances of *Punch and Judy* at the side of the Royal Institution galleries (NG1/3/32). The clamour of "two rival performances" had caused boys to spill over into the "interior side steps of the Royal Institution within its Railings...clambering up its Pillars". "Moreover", wrote the Board, "a leading access to the National Gallery for foot passengers is blocked by the *crowd* and made *very disagreeable* to pass". On the pretext of damage to the pillars, the Board declared: "This of course cannot be allowed and must be put a stop to" (NG1/3/32, my emphasis).<sup>20</sup> In short, carnival was severed, folk culture extricated from the visual field, leaving an unsullied space where bourgeois recognised bourgeois, but in relative hush.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Without addressing these statements in detail, we can point to certain important themes here, viz. 1) boys are transgressing sacred boundaries 2) the boundaries between high and low must be maintained 3) the crowd is in some sense problematic ("disagreeable").

<sup>21</sup> As Stallybrass and White show, the attempt to eliminate carnival and popular festivity from bourgeois life was common in Europe, but varied according to religious, economic and political factors. In Scotland, the religious backlash against intemperance was perhaps the most visible

Or rather, we should say, folk culture in its *overt* and *palpable* materiality was extricated from the National Gallery of Scotland. For the genre scenes of the Dutch Masters in Room V (Lingelbach's *Figures at a Door of an Alehouse* and Teniers' *Peasants playing at Skittles*, for instance); of the modern Scottish genre scenes of Walter Geickie and others in Room III; as well as the later acquisitions of David Allan and David Wilkie; all of these depicted the rural and labouring poor and scenes from popular celebrations such as weddings.

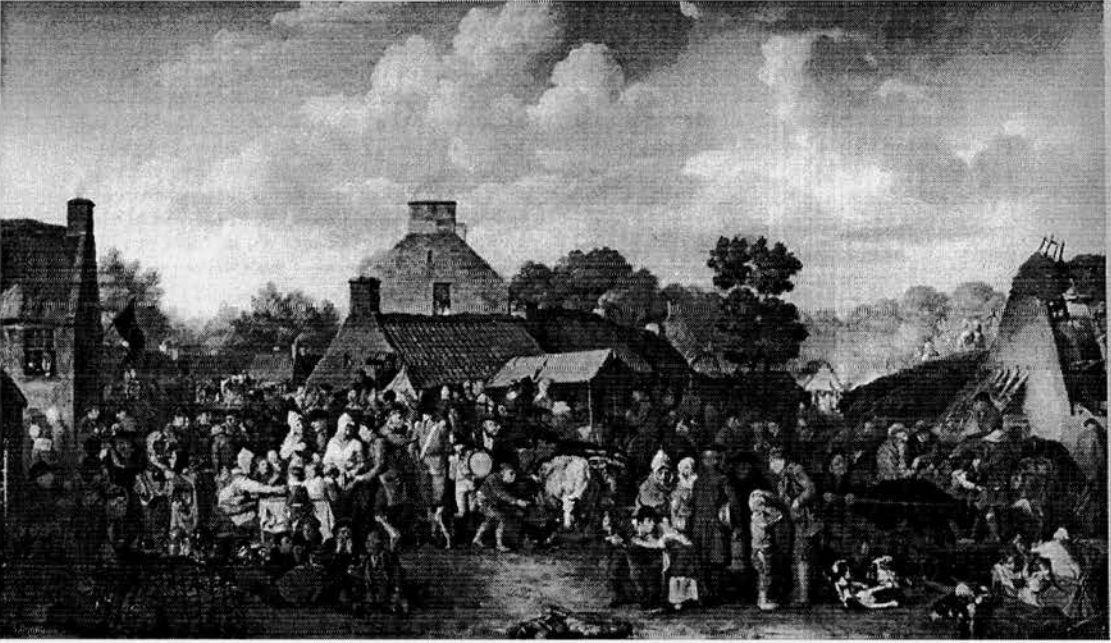


Figure 86: *Pitlessie Fair*, Sir David Wilkie, 1804

The repressed or unpalatable, however, had returned in nostalgic or palatable form. The characters had been bowdlerised, sentimentalised or turned into objects of humour. They were divested of dirt and famine, ordered and knew their rank. The lower orders had returned, in other words, as *spectacle*, as distanced, once-removed, voyeuristic, unreal; as framed and therefore controlled. In the terms of the quote on Edinburgh which opened this sub-section, the vulgar and low were both outside as "dirty periphery" but also fetishised "inside", like the religious, decorative or cabinet pictures themselves.

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form of this suppression of popular clamour. As Fraser (1990) notes, the tavern had ceased to become a forum for enlightened ideas and bonhomie and more a place for drinking, liminality and rowdy games. This spoke of the class polarisation of leisure pursuits in Scotland.



## F: Conclusion

But for now, it is enough to end this chapter with some closing comments. On its opening the Lord Provost of Edinburgh and Bailie Forester spoke of the national gallery as a "source of refined and intellectual enjoyment to all classes of the community, from the highest to the lowest" (*Scotsman*, Wednesday March 23 1859). The trustees and their catalogue reiterated this idea of universal accessibility. The collection was said to admit of the industrial worker, the intelligent student and the amateur a capacity to make inferences "by comparison, calculated to advance him in the theory and practice of art" (EUL, I\* 15/2.6). But what was disavowed in these statements was the fact of uneven distribution *vis-a-vis* the possession of an informed aesthetic *habitus*; of the cultivated visitor's capacity to stave off the necessities of work and survival and partake of the refined pleasures that education and leisure sewed.

Administrators assumed a "public" that, whilst being structurally and experientially differentiated in the gallery, was held up as an unproblematic whole. Rarely did the gallery's idea of its public coincide with the actual community it served most naturally. Only in a limited sense did the gallery cater for and invite a universal populace. In contrast to some of the science and technology based projects of the "popular enlightenment" in Scotland, the gallery did not emerge as an institution of mass improvement.<sup>22</sup> Its remit was never to inculcate "useful knowledge" in as many of the lower classes as possible, or to de-radicalise potential agitators. Bourgeois subject positions and identities were clearly marked out for preference and fulfilment. The gallery's four layers of spatial effect became a marked argot by which Edinburgh's superintendents of high art collectively established a familiar set of codes that, in turn, constructed a known space. The gallery, to this extent, was saturated with its own social history.

Part of this social history was bound up with the Board of Trustees own role. As

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<sup>22</sup> Such projects included Thomas Dick's mechanic institutes, libraries for working people and post Reform Act mutual improvement societies (Smith, 1983). The utilitarian framework of philanthropy and education did not fit so well with the gallery project, here, because fine art carried with it a specific history of elite appropriation.



this organisation gradually shed its commercial role and its aristocratic membership, it came to embody the tensions in the democratic project that emerged with the bourgeois class' own contradictory historical role. For bourgeois democracy, whilst certainly enlightened and progressive in its ideals (the Board was undoubtedly serious about its task to open up the art world in Scotland to a broader social constituency), was also the harbinger of codes and practices that creamed off the leading class from those below. Notwithstanding the liberal and emancipatory character of its democratic reforms this class had etched into its cultural identity marks by which it rendered itself distinctive and pre-eminent.

Literally, the space and setting that framed the gallery symbolised Edinburgh's move to refinement. The Mound had been built from earth extracted from the basements of New Town houses. More than providing an enclosed setting for high art, though, the Mound was the visible means whereby the Old Town and its vulgar populace was obscured, distanced and disconnected. The gallery project, therefore, spoke of the polarisation of class divisions in (economic) power, leisure, and education.

In his essay on the "*musée*", Bataille characterises the museum project, and the Louvre in particular, as bearing the marks of blood that the guillotine had left after 1789 (Hollier, 1992). For Bataille, such institutions embody contradictory energies. The rise of the museum is also the metaphorical rise of the slaughterhouse (the guillotine); there is cleanliness but also a "dirty" history; art is secular but the experience can be profoundly ritualistic. These oppositions contain but also hide each other. No blood tainted the Mound as such. But this does not mean the site was as unsullied as the objects it displayed. For regardless of the differences between the political impulses underpinning the Louvre and the National Gallery of Scotland, they both emerged as spatial constellations at the interplay between displaying, legitimating and excluding.

All of which brings us back to the social parameters of space. For "no space is 'innocent' or devoid of meaning" in Chaney's words (1994: 149). The organisation of space is a highly potent mode of establishing identities, boundaries and subject positions. Places embody, but also circulate and hierarchise social interests. They can, therefore, be "read", or "deconstructed" if you like, as cultural "texts" themselves, with audiences,

idioms, narratives, socially located readers, methods of distribution, and socio-cultural genealogies. The task of organising space is a necessity for all communities that order social experience. Not all spaces are equal, however. Many are manipulated by powerful social forces and inscribed with historically patterned ideologies which elevate them beyond the reaches of the collective. We make and remake space but not in circumstances of our own choosing, but under circumstances directly transmitted according to economic, social and political interests (Duncan and Ley, 1993).

From this perspective, in which space is not an empty site of representation but loaded with power, the question of displacement and privilege in the gallery has to become central. For "where somewhere is" pertains not to the rhetorics of ideologues and professionals, but to the material levels of experience - levels which, in the gallery, are coded in a distinction between those with an aesthetic disposition and those *strangers without*.

## CONCLUSION

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“Artistic development towards autonomy progressed at different rates, according to the society and field of artistic life in question” (Bourdieu, 1983: 113).

Rather than summarize or reiterate previous chapters, I thought it appropriate and profitable to tease out five implications from the thesis. This will, of course, include the process of summarizing, but in combination with a spirit of opening out the thesis to broader and current concerns in the field. Comment will therefore be made on the status of historical comparison and models of museum development that, in turn, raise questions of contemporary significance respecting space and social inclusion.

Firstly, only by recognising *relational* social determinations, both structures and dispositions, can the socio-cultural history attempted in this thesis succeed. Such an awareness promotes a balanced understanding divested of the distortions of excessive national feeling that is better placed to deal with “the particularities of different *collective histories*” (Bourdieu, 1998: 3). The claim that Scottish social development wound a totally different path to that of England’s, for instance, replaces an “us too” sociology with a “not us” sociology (McCrone, 1992) based on just such distortions. At a political-economic level, the terms “client”, “periphery”, “domination” and “colony” have readily been applied to understand Scotland’s industrial growth and voting behaviour (Dickson, 1989); while, at a cultural level, Scotland’s distinct civil society has been posited as the ground on which radical national divergence is fostered and consolidated, giving rise to specificity across a range of cultural and ideological forms. In Beveridge and Turnbull’s account (1989), recovering Scottish distinctiveness is, hence, a matter of cutting through cultural inferiorism and revealing independent national practices unsullied by English culture.

The search for core national attributes, however - the emphasis on a “democratic intellect” (Davie, 1961), intransigent Kirk or unique empiricism, has a tendency to morph into an introspective search for a national *geist* that says more about a historiographical

and political present then it does a social history of the past. While “truculent exceptionalism” might be a useful corrective to over-generalised accounts of “British history”, it too easily becomes incommensurate with a properly relational understanding of development (Wrightson, 1989). If Scottish culture is viewed too long through the lens of “particularism” questions of historical genealogy begin to take on the search for an internal national cognition. This distorts the thrust of comparative social history and narrows the scope of inquiry to a selective excavation of a national *sine qua non* or style. What must be attempted, instead, is an approach that steers between the Scylla of particularism and the Charybdis of universalism - a matter of recognising Scottish development in terms of parallels and divergences, concentrated in the “same as/different to” calculation (McCrone, 1992: 74).

Secondly, the implications for models of museum development can be similarly assessed. On the one hand, “relatively distinct” cases such as England and Scotland may necessitate a re-consideration of accounts which stress a “general museum idea” (Duncan, 1990), based on a “history-as-revolutions” approach to artistic development, and more generally an approach to historical transition based on hermetic dichotomies and ideal typologies of culture. To treat the Louvre case as a paradigmatic model which is more or less generalisable to other cases is perhaps misleading. The problem, as with all ideal types, is that many cases escape the limits of what is explainable under the model, suggesting the deficiencies of this model. In other words, understanding might be stymied by adherence to paradigms which are unable to do justice to local conditions of production. For every field, as Bourdieu’s opening quote indicates, has unique influences which shape the contours of the institutions involved.

On the other hand, again, within limits, everywhere is unique. The task of cultural history is, ideally, to locate local productions within global conditions. Or rather, an historical cultural sociology should find its task not merely in the primacy of relations, but in a consideration of the variant in the common, what Bachelard terms a “special case of what is possible” (cited in Bourdieu, 1998: 2). The national gallery of Scotland, in this view, emerged in particular conditions of a finite space of possibilities. It was delivered in and through a unique combination of forces, problems, struggles and movements



bounded by the British and European contexts. Hence, a broad fit is apparent with those aspects of museum formation outlined in chapters two and three - a role for enlightenment, civil society, the growth of market patronage, and the gradual autonomisation of the field of cultural production. Further, like all galleries of fine art, Edinburgh's was grounded in a process of exclusivity that codified it as a sign of symbolic capital, a cultural resource predisposed to demarcate, valorize and select refined modes of apprehension. Where distinctions can and should be made between cases is in the nuanced differences of pace, chronology and the detailed profile of the key social agents involved. Along these lines, valid contrasts may indeed be drawn which would advance understandings of *bona fide* rarities in the progression of cultural fields.

Thirdly, if historical forms are relational, then so are texts. This raises the question of how the present thesis fit with other contemporary studies of museums and galleries. The problem with answering this lies with the disparate and shifting nature of the field of research in this area. Museums, in particular, are rich in their research potential, not only because they appear to fortify a cultural *doxa* under threat in postmodern social space (permanence, nationhood, teleology, art, history), but because they have a unique power to represent identities, objects and histories. Against "reductionist" readings of art and classification, however, recent scholarship has tended to suggest that museums were, and are, open and negotiated terrains of social life: not predetermined by a single class, but subject to persistent struggles over space and identity (Macdonald and Fyfe, 1996). In effect, they are indeterminate, contradictory, shifting spaces, it is claimed, subject to contesting meanings and open-ended acts of (mis)interpretation: sites of cultural flows and unexpected practices that signify divergences between the intentions of regulators and the practices or interpretations of "consumers". The historical accounts of French art museums presented by Sherman (1987) and Duncan and Wallach (1980), in this view, present "an over-integrated account of the state-museum-class configuration", ignoring considerable ruptures and contingencies in the system of relations between class and museum (Fyfe, 1996: 206). What should be counterposed to dominant ideological readings, it is argued, is the museum as process and agency, as a space of flows and discursive conflicts.

Undoubtedly, the present thesis may similarly be charged with failing to capture the indeterminate and contingent character of museum identities, emphasising as it does social control and regulation as a dimension of the bourgeois struggle for cultural distinction. To compound matters, the lack of archive material relating to low-level use (a problem general to the area of museum studies) reduces the source of interpretation to plans, reports, newspapers, official records and letters, that relay little of the experiential and unincorporated (unless you count boys throwing stones as a meaningful act of resistance, which might, of course, be the case). In its defence, however, the thesis has attempted to map some of the tensions and struggles, as well as closures, that characterised the National Gallery of Scotland's evolution - particularly the conflicts between vying artistic factions in Edinburgh's art field in the early nineteenth century. It has dealt with processes of institutional, material and ideational *becoming*, because the conflicts and evolutions were both historical and open-ended, as the subsequent history of the Scottish art field shows.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, while the thesis is broadly grounded in neo-Marxist approaches to culture, it has also striven to avoid over-integrated accounts that reduce artistic phenomena to mere reflections of preconstituted socio-economic relations, instead emphasising the transformative role that the former has on, and in, the latter. The very targets of analysis - space, artistic practice, the "nation", romanticism, civil society, the enlightenment - have intimated an approach to cultural artifacts that is responsive to the

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<sup>1</sup> Just as the modernist impulse transmuted modes of painting and appreciation throughout Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century (as outlined in Bourdieu's (1993) analysis of the Parisian art field in the age of Manet), so Glasgow's vitality as a modern artistic centre impressed the Scottish art field with more fissures. Academy artists were now placed in the position of conservers of an outmoded aesthetic that was being attacked by a new breed of modernists, the "Glasgow Boys". Painters such as Guthrie, Hornel, Lavery, and MacGregor incorporated continental modes of representation into their bucolic scenes, insisting on the primacy of form and style over content or narrative. This signaled a rupture with "academic art", of traditional bourgeois forms, and a turn to the "pure aesthetic" that was central to the field's on-going logic of conflict and autonomy. As for patronage, Glasgow's prosperity as a centre of British manufacturing concentrated market power amongst industrial magnates, who also built their own museums and galleries (the Burrell collection and the McLellan Galleries, for instance). Needless to say, the Royal Scottish Academy experienced rapid atrophy in this period, its takings down from £5,000 in 1863, to £1,280 in the 1890s (Thompson, 1972). The Academy's ability to define art therefore dissolved, as the cultural field modernised, diversified and de-centred.

duality of cultural production: of products stabilizing a "field of operations" in which they are made and re-made (Brain, 1994).<sup>2</sup> A greater sensitivity is, therefore, implicit in cultural methodologies that resist ready-made elisions of economy and culture, but which acknowledge that the two can, and do, occupy relatively distinct social spaces. The fact that the fields under study have often yielded to an investigation of economic/political over artistic/cultural conditions, says more about their relative underdevelopment historically (as heteronomous fields) than it does about the theoretical or methodological assumptions.

Equally, while the notion of "exclusion" does not extinguish the range of possibilities of museum logics in the cases mentioned, only more research of particular cases will reveal this.<sup>3</sup> In principle, then, the thesis can be read as an intervention into the field of (Scottish) cultural history and, perforce, an incitement to greater dialogue and

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<sup>2</sup> As Crane writes of this approach, "because the cultural object itself is conceptualized as a powerful embodiment of cultural meanings and practices, it is perceived as an influence on organizational and structural relationships rather than as merely the outcome of such relationships" (1994: 16).

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, Trodd's recent reading of the National Gallery in mid-Victorian London as a space of ocular fluidity at the interplay of "incongruous social meanings" - of hygiene, wonder, work, learning, leisure, etc. (1998: 14). This sets itself quite explicitly against disciplinary or totalizing analyses of museums and galleries, but in its elaborate, but self-contradictory elision of "heterotopic" tendencies with symbolic dichotomies (urban/rural, order/chaos, unity/disunity) displaces analysis away from the field as a totality (including the differentials in capital possessed and mobilized by social agents before they enter the gallery). Incidentally, what is often at issue, here, is a question of social control, intention and "readership" that mirrors the debates rehearsed in popular and media studies in the 1980s, out of which Gramsci was posited as a "saviour". Certainly there is room for a Gramscian reading of the struggle for hegemony undertaken historically by competing social factions over the museum (the state, private philanthropists, reformers, industrialists, populists, connoisseurs), who may or may not gravitate towards a definite ideological set. This is worth considering if only because hegemony implies an on-going cultural struggle for social authority that must accommodate alternative social positions, although Gramsci's emphasis on the "ethical state", as already noted, fails to encompass the movement towards autonomy and distinction that also characterises this process. However, another "way out" of avoiding a free-for-all sociology of readership without constraints might be recourse to a notion of "preferred readings". As an event is always framed, managed and ordered (usually dependent on a great deal of stage work/authorship) the boundaries of readership are shaped within certain limits (cultural norms, physical possibilities, particular languages), outwith which it is very difficult to operate. We might argue that there was a "preferred reading" managed in the organization of the National Gallery of Scotland, authored, but not closed by professional bourgeois norms. Other readings were certainly possible but normatively peripheralised and devalorized.

research across disciplines. Moreover, it is an antidote to the, often, automatic reliance on (fashionable) rejoinders to social control - indeterminacy, flux, the sovereign consumer - which displaces analysis away from an understanding of an enduring feature of art museums - that they endure. This must at least alert us to the process of reproduction that has been so central to Bourdieu's sociology. Bourdieu himself cannot provide all the answers, but he at least asks the most pertinent questions, *viz.*: How are social formations sustained? Where do galleries fit in these formations? What constitutes a field of cultural production? How is art classification achieved? Whose gaze is it? And how is taste implicated in the reproduction of inequalities? While often more useful in the French context, and on the mechanics of symbolic violence and stasis rather than symbolic invitations and social change, these questions remain central to the on-going problem of culture-mediated power relations and social order.<sup>4</sup>

Fourthly, to sketch some implications in the contemporary cultural terrain: the National Gallery of Scotland today remains, as it was, an institution of high culture: a little more commodified (the guards wear "tartan trews" and the shop is all-important), a little less exclusive (the summer festivities in Edinburgh bring "carnival" regularly to the area outside the gallery, the range of acceptable behaviours has widened and distinct *habitués* are much harder to discern), a little more rationalised (an extra level has been added and the gallery now possesses one of the most significant art collections outside London), but still a national gallery of fine art: a space of taste, national identity and refinement. Indeed, the historical correspondences are more than accidental: today, the gallery has been refurbished to a scheme that the director claims to authentically emulate that of 1859 - red cloth-hung walls, period furniture, "cluttered hang" and all. Whether this is postmodern nostalgia (*a la* Prince Charles) or an entrenched defence of connoisseurship is a matter of speculation. That Timothy Clifford's penchant is for the latter, however, is suggested by his inclination to defend retro-style in the lexicon of "taste" rather than populism; and the desire for antiquarian academicism is signaled by

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<sup>4</sup> The claim that Bourdieu presents an overly functional and consensual account is surprising given his regular reiteration that fields are Heraclitean in nature - "the product and the stake of a permanent conflict...the generative and unifying principle of this 'system' is the struggle itself" (1996: 232) and do not result from some sort of objective collusion.



the disposition of some pictures out of public sight, resting as they do, above the large arches which dominate the gallery.<sup>5</sup>

If knowledge of a field of historical forces and possibilities is able to keep alive a critical sociology, then the implications of "our" history for the present must be accounted. With museum (let alone gallery) attendance figures still showing a marked skewing towards the educated middle classes (Cultural Trends, 1995), it can be noted that despite the director's intentions, or perhaps because of them, the gallery's double-coded history is residual today. Indeed, the populist education department and Clifford's ventures into connoisseurship co-exist; as do the blockbuster exhibitions (Monet to Matisse, German Romanticism) with the permanent collection. Similarly, the Scottish and British flags fly simultaneously atop the neo-classical edifice, the former gaining greater credence as Scottish civil society reasserts its independence and as a canon of *Scottish Art* is reconstructed, commodified and displayed in the new gallery of Scottish art in Glasgow. Finally, the on-going disputes between the Royal Scottish Academy and the National Galleries of Scotland in the cultural field is testament to the reality of history as a palimpsest, delivering a cultural legacy of conflict to a new generation of artistic agents. For while the RSA was given its own quarters, the old Royal Institution building, after the National Galleries of Scotland Act in 1906, and the Board of Manufactures became a down-sized Board of (seven) Trustees for the National Gallery of Scotland, the two institutions have fought consistently over the stakes of the contemporary art field. It is still evident, for instance, that the Academy's on-going desire for artistic autonomy (guaranteed by its ambiguous private/public status) is resisted by the Gallery's Trustees, whose own designs on the Academy building are well known (Williams, 1992).

Which is where this account must end: with the tensions and conflicts inherent

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<sup>5</sup> "What worries me is that a new generation is growing up that is being selected to work in museums not because they are passionate amateurs but because they have proven administrative skills, and perhaps little else...My plea is that museums and their governing bodies should set greater store by their staff's powers of connoisseurship and scholarship" (Clifford, 1992: 35-37). Clifford's defence of the "gentlemanly", or "cluttered hang" is couched in terms of the public's active role in ranking various artists from different schools, although historically such an ability presupposed in the viewer a Grand Tour education and a knowledge of critical terms, forms and concepts in an approach to old masters (McLellan, 1994; Duncan, 1995).

in the national art gallery: a space of taste and conflict, within a space of the imagined, the nation. Both were furnished out of prior constellations - absolutist, princely, enlightened - and reconfigured into cultural territories symbolically appropriated by Europe's rising historical classes.

But, finally, what of the stranger? I finished chapter eight with a cursory suggestion that the stranger was somehow *without*, implying a kind of dispossession, alterity, externality. My assumption was that the gallery was a space that fitted ill with the *habitudes* of the lower classes, effectively turning them into strangers. Perhaps we can take this a step further and suggest that the nation, too, worked "to deal with the problem of strangers" - "foreigners", "aliens", "immigrants", "rebels", "outsiders" (Bauman, 1988: 153). Such figures exist in a tension between inclusion/exclusion, friend/enemy, known/unknown, inside/outside (Simmel, 1950).<sup>6</sup> They are formally welcomed and rhetorically incorporated but informally vetoed and symbolically repudiated. While the figure of the stranger perhaps captures more adequately the position of women in the symbolic space of the nation (Kristeva, 1993), it serves to raise some serious issues about all social groups whose position in the social order is assumed rather than analyzed (evident in the dubious generality of "citizenship" for instance).

The stranger upsets these assumptions by unmasking the ambiguity of social space, defamiliarising the familiar, making us re-interpret the limits of the known, threatening refined order with the "fear of the other" (Kristeva, 1990). Most famously in Camus, *l'étranger* was the figure "condemned because he doesn't play the game" (Camus, 1942: 118). For playing the game marks one's inclusion in any social space, dependent on possessing the relevant frame of reference: demeanour, dress, linguistic codes, for instance. The rules lie beyond careful formulation because "correct" participation is implicit in the very logic of the field for those disposed. Without overstretching the parallels, the high cultural spaces of Edinburgh's New Town, and its National Gallery, were spaces which demarcated the familiar from the strange for

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<sup>6</sup> In Simmel's (1908) formulation: "The stranger is close to us, insofar as we feel between him and ourselves common features of a national, social, occupational, or generally human, nature. He is far from us, insofar as these common features extend beyond him or us, and connect us only because they connect a great many people" (quoted in Wolff, 1950: 406).

Scotland's leading classes. Estrangement, it follows, was a principal mode of operation, not least because membership of a social, political or cultural community was bounded by historical limitations - the franchise, property, privation, for instance. Refined social space does not act in mechanical collusion with the pre-determined calculations of the higher classes, but it is surely an aspect of their difference, their elevation. And if sociology is still a matter of unveiling cultural arbitraries and systems of power - the common sense of social space - then it must still be incumbent on us to start with the strange rather than the familiar.

# APPENDIX I

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## INDEX TO PICTURES IN THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF SCOTLAND CATALOGUE, 1859

All artists, numbers, attributions and spelling are those originally claimed in the catalogue. Artists in bold type. I have organised the collection into rooms. This was not done in the catalogue, but I have reconstructed the disposition with the help of newspapers, Johnstone's memos and the Board's minutes, to go with the narrative in chapter eight.

### Abbreviations

A.B. - Marquis of Abercorn

T - Torrie Collection

RSA - Royal Scottish Academy

B.M - Property of the Board

A - Royal Association for the Promotion of Fine Arts in Scotland

RI - Royal Institution

R - Henry Raeburn

### **ROOM I - British Portraits**

1. David Hume; **A. Ramsay** (B.M.)
2. The Artist, **W. Aikman** (RSA)
3. John Gay; **W. Aikman** (RSA)
4. Richard Cooper; **J. Davidson** (RSA)
5. The Artist; **J. Runciman** (BM)
6. The Artist; **T. Duncan** (RSA)
7. Sir William Gibson Craig; **Sir J. W. Gordon** (RSA)
8. Archibald Skirving; **G. Watson** (RSA)
9. Lady Bury; **Sir Thomas Lawrence** (AB)
10. The Artist; **David Allan** (RSA)
11. A Lady; **Sir H. Raeburn** (R)
12. Sir William Johnston; **Sir J. Watson Gordon** (RSA)
13. The Artist; **G. Watson** (RSA)
14. The Artist; **Sir William Allan** (RSA)
15. Admiral Maitland; **Sir H. Raeburn** (R.)
16. Bust of Sir David Wilkie; **Samuel Joseph** (RSA)
17. Bust of the Rt. Hon. Henry Brougham (RSA).
18. A Scotch Lassie; **Patric Park** (RSA)
19. David Scott; **John Steell** (RSA)
20. Sir John Watson Gordon; **Graham Gilbert** (RSA)
21. Hon. Lord Cockburn; **Sir J. Watson Gordon** (RSA)
22. John Gibson; **Graham Gilbert** (RSA)
23. Benjamin West; **George Watson** (RSA)
24. William Simson; **Robert Scott Lauder** (RSA)



25. The Artist's son; **Sir H. Raeburn** (R.)
26. Peter Spalding; **Sir J. Watson Gordon** (RSA)
27. H. W. Williams; **William Nicholson** (RSA)
28. Lady Hamilton; **Sir Thomas Lawrence** (AB)
29. Right Hon. Lord Rutherford; **Sir J. W. Gordon** (RSA)
30. Rev. John Thomson; **Robert Scott Lauder** (RSA)
31. Mrs R. Scott Moncrieff; **Sir H Raeburn** (RSA)
32. Hon. J Hope, Lord Justice Clerk; **Colvin Smith** (RSA)
33. David Hume; **Unknown** (B.M.)
34. Hon. Lord Cockburn; **John Syme** (RSA)

## **ROOM II - Dutch, Flemish, Spanish, Italian Old Masters**

35. Saint Peter; **Guercino** (RI)
36. Interior of St Peters; **Pannini** (AB)
37. Deposition from the Cross; **Rembrandt** (AB)
38. Don Balthazar Carlos; **Velasquez** (AB)
39. Landscape; **Tavella** (RI)
40. A Venetian Senator; **Tintoretto** (AB)
41. Holy Family; **Cambiaso** (RI)
42. A Duchess of Savoy; **Vandyck** (AB)
43. Landscape and Figures; **Huysman** (RI)
44. A Venetian Senator; **Tintoretto** (AB)
45. Interior of the Basilica, St Paul's; **Pannini** (AB)
46. The Hon. Captain Hamilton; **Sir Joshua Reynolds** (AB)
47. Saint Christopher; **Lanfranco** (RSA)
48. Head of Saint Sebastien; **Furini** (RI)
49. A Senator; **Bassano** (RI)
50. A Mathematician; **Spagnoletto** (RSA)
51. Head; **Veronese** (AB)
52. A Poetess; **Furini** (RI)
53. Seaport, with Figures; **Miel** (RI)
54. Marriage of St Catherine; **Albano** - (A.B.)
55. Landscape; **R. Wilson** (AB)
56. Interior; **A. V. Ostade** (RSA)
57. Anthony and Cleopatra; **Tiepolo** (RI)
58. Head; **Parmigiano** (AB)
59. Landscape; **Both** (RI)
60. Elevation of the Cross; **Unknown** (RI)
61. Alesandro Farnese; **Sustermans** (RI)
62. Architectural subject, with figures; **Van Delen** (RI)
63. Death of Abel; **Caracci** (RI)
64. Saint Sebastien; **Spagnoletto** (RI)
65. Adoration of the Magi; **Titian** (RSA)
66. Ruins and Figures; **Ferguson** (RSA)

67. Secretary of Leo X; **Unknown** (RI)
68. Adoration of the Shepherds; **Palma** (RI)
69. Architectural subject; **Hoekgeest** (RI)
70. Request of the Mother of Zebedee's Children; **Tintoretto** (AB)
71. Bacchus and Ariadne; **Sebastiano del Piombo** (RI)
72. Saint Jerome; **Francheschini** (RI)
73. Saint John; **Sirani** (RI)
74. Landscape and Figures; **Grimaldi** (RSA)
75. Boar Hunt; **Snyders** (RI)

### **ROOM III - (Modern) British Artists**

76. The Student; **W. S. Watson** (RSA)
77. The Stirrup-Cup; **Sir W. Allan** (RSA)
78. Sentinels; **R S Lauder** (RSA)
79. Grandfather's Lesson; **Sir J. Watson Gordon** (RSA)
80. Columbus; **G. Harvey** (A)
81. Craigmiller Castle; **R. Gibb** (RI)
82. Group of Trees; **E. T. Crawford** (RI)
83. Solway Moss-Sunset; **W. Simson** (RSA)
84. Borthwick Castle; **R. Gibb** (RSA)
85. Quarrel betw. Oberon and Titania; **J. Noel Paton** (A)
86. Leith Pier; **D. O. Hill** (RI)
87. Landscape; **W. Simson** (RSA)
88. Series of three pictures, illustrating the
89. deliverance of Bethulia ; **Wm Etty** (RSA)
90. by Judith
91. Glenfishie; **Rev. J. Thomson** (AB)
92. View near Edinburgh; **R. Gibb** (RSA)
93. Coast Scene; **J. Wilson** (RSA)
94. Summer; **A. Geddes** (RI)
95. Venus Carrying off Acanius; **H. Howard** (RI)
96. Inverlochy Castle; **H. McCulloch** (A)
97. Dunstanburgh Castle; **E. T. Crawford** (RSA)
98. The Black Dwarf; **Sir W. Allan** (RI)
99. Reconciliation of Oberon and Titania; **J. N. Paton** (RSA)
100. Coast Scene; **J. F. Williams** (RSA)
101. Gowbarrow Park; **J. Stark** (RI)
102. The Weird Wife; **J. Giles** (RSA)
103. A Ferry Boat; **J. Wilson** (RSA)
104. The Porteous Mob; **J. Drummond** (A)
105. Don Quixote attacking the Windmill; **W. S. Watson** (RI)
106. Landscape composition; **P. Gibson** (RSA)
107. Standard Bearer; **J. Stevens** (RSA)
108. The Bracelet; **D. Macnee** (RSA)

109. View at Tivoli; **A. Wilson** (RSA)
110. Italian Nobleman; **J. Graham Gilbert** (RSA)
111. Jew Rabbi; **F. Grant** (RSA)
112. Rosalind and Celia; **J. Archer** (RSA)
113. Ruins of Hadrian's Wall; **A. Wilson** (RSA)
114. Scene in Holyrood, 1566; **W. B. Johnstone** (RSA)
115. Cain Degraded; **D. Scott** (RSA)
116. Rome-sunset; **D. Roberts** (RSA)
117. Oberon and Titania; **J. N. Paton** (RSA)
118. Jeanie Deans and the Robbers; **T. Duncan** (RSA)
119. Turnberry Castle; **Rev. J. Thomson** (RI)
120. James I at Windsor; **J. Drummond** (RSA)
121. Christ Teacheth Humility; **R. S. Lauder** (A)
122. Benaiah; **W. Etty** (RSA)
123. The Hermit; **G. Watson** (RSA)
124. The Battle of Bannockburn; **Sir W. Allan** (RSA)
125. Hagar; **J. E. Lauder** (RSA)
126. A Rocky Glen; **D. O. Hill** (RSA)
127. The Good Samaritan; **J. A. Houston** (RSA)
128. Cottage Scene, with figures; **W. Geickie** (RSA)
129. Stirling Castle; **A. Nasmyth** (RI)
130. The Alarm; **G. Harvey** (RSA)

#### **ROOM IV - Italian, Spanish, Dutch, Flemish Old Masters**

131. Christ on the Mount of Olives; **Pordenone** (RI)
132. Landscape, with figures; **School of Poussin** (RI)
133. St Peter; **Unknown** (RI)
134. Shepherd with a Pipe; **Morinello** (RI)
135. Autumn; **Tintoretto** (RI)
136. Landscape and figures; **Scorza** (RI)
137. Portrait; **Giorgione** (RI)
138. Portrait in Armour; **Vandyck** (RI)
139. Lomellini Family; **Vandyck** (RI)
140. St Sebastian; **Vandyck** (RI)
141. Peter Delivered; **School of Guido** (RI)
142. Battle Field; **Spanish School** (B.M)
143. Mars and Venus; **P. Veronese** (RI)
144. Portrait; **School of Titian** (RI)
145. Landscape and figures; **Scorza** (RI)
146. Christ Driving the Sellers from the Temple; **Garafalo** (RI)
147. Cupid; **Procaccini** (RI)
148. Summer; **Tintoretto** (RI)
149. Winter; **Tintoretto** (RI)
150. The finding of Moses; **Tiepolo** (RI)

151. View in Venice; **Canaletto** (RI)
152. Virgin and Child with St Joseph; **School of Titian** (RI)
153. Battle Piece; **Reschi** (RI)
154. Repso; **Paggi** (RI)
155. Christ driving the Seller out of the Temple; **Bassano** (RI)
156. The Last Supper; **Bonifazio** (RI)
157. Landscape; **Titian** (RI)
158. Portrait; **Bol** (RI)
159. Landscape, with Monks engaged at Devotion; **Bernazzano** (RI)
160. Lady at her Toilet; **Bordone** (RI)
161. Portrait; **Tintoretto** (RI)
162. A Head; **Vandyck** (RI)
163. A Burgomaster and his Wife; **Vander Werf** (RI)
164. Madonna, Infant, and St John; **Guercino** (RI)

#### **ROOM V - Torrie Collection: Old Masters and Modern Pictures**

165. Two Heads; **Giorgione** (T)
166. Virgin, and Child, and St Catherine; **Titian** (T)
167. Landscape and Figures; **Salvator Rosa** (T)
168. Venus and Adonis; **Verononse** (T)
169. Martyrdom of St Andrew; **Domenichino** (T)
170. Dead Christ; **Procaccini** (T)
171. Land Storm; **Poussin** (T)
172. Ecce Homo; **Guido** (T)
173. Landscape; **Domenichino** (T)
174. Battle Piece; **Giulio Romano** (T)
175. Wolf Hunt; **Snyders** (T)
176. Landscape and figures; **Both** (T)
177. Sea Piece; **Dutch School** (T)
178. Party at Cards; **Le Duc** (T)
179. Landscape; **Hobbema** (T)
180. Fishing Boats in a Calml; **W. Vanderveelde** (T)
181. A Pasticcio; **David Teniers the Younger** (T)
182. Landscape and Figures; **A. Vanderveelde** (T)
183. Sea Piece; **Backhuysen** (T)
184. Physician and Patient; **Steen** (T)
185. Boar Hunt; **Snyders** (T)
186. Landscape and figures; **Du Jardine** (T)
187. Landscape; **Ruysdael** (T)
188. Landscape and figures; **Pynaker** (T)
189. Figures at Door of an Alehouse; **Lingelbach** (T)
190. Wood Scene; **Vander Heyden** (T)
191. Landscape; **R. Wilson** (T)
192. Landscape and figures; **Both** (T)



193. Small landscape and figures; **School of Berghem** (T)
194. Architectural composition of Ruins etc.; **Ghisolfi** (T)
195. Woodland Scene; **Rembrandt** (T)
196. Dutch Landscape - Sunset; **Ossenbeck** (T)
197. Landscape; **Rembrandt** (T)
198. Landscape and Cattle; **A. Vandewelde** (T)
199. Ditto Ditto; **Berghem** (T)
200. Landscape and Figures; **Ruysdael** (T)
201. Farrier's shop; **Du Jardin** (T)
202. Peasants playing at Skittles; **D. Teniers the Younger** (T)
203. Interior of a Cathedral; **Neefs** (T)
204. Ruins and Figures; **Ghisolfi** (T)
205. Interior and Figures; **Greuze** (T)
206. Landscape and Figures; **Vander Meulen** (T)
207. The Combat; **W. Etty** (RSA)
208. John Knox dispensing the Sacrament; **D. Wilkie** (RSA)
209. Temple of Minerva; **H. W. Williams** (RI)
210. Ariel and Caliban; **D Scott** (RSA)
211. Infant Hercules; **W. Dyce** (RI)
212. Ariadne in Naxos; **After Titian** (RSA)
213. The Marriage in Cana; **Study from Veronese** (RSA)
214. St John Preaching; **Study from Veronese** (RSA)
215. Woodland Scene; **Hobbema** (T)
216. Rocky Landscape with Figures; **Both** (T)
217. Battle Piece; **Borgogone** (T)
218. Skirmish of Cavalry; **Borgogone** (T)
- 219 to 256: Marbles and Bronzes (T)

#### **SMALL OCTAGON (CABINET ROOM) - Various Schools, Copies**

- 257 to 320: Drawings by **J. F. Lewis** - Titian, Velasquez, Rubens, Veronese, Bassano, Giorgione, Murillo, Rembrandt, Vandyck, Watteau
321. Landscape; **Doughty** (RI)
  322. Decollation of John the Baptist; **Feti** (B.M)
  323. Dead Christ; **Guido Reni** (RI)
  324. The Crucifixion; **Copy from Rubens** (RSA)
  325. Edmund Burke; **Sir J. Reynolds** (BM)
  326. The Entombment; **Copy from Titian** (RI)
  327. The Marquis of Guasto and Mistress; **Copy from Titian** (RI)
  328. Figures of Saints; **A. Christie** (B.M)
  329. St Peter and another Apostle; **After Guido** (B.M)
  330. The Marriage in Cana; **After Paul Veronese** (RI)
  331. The Transfiguration; **Copy from Raphael** (RI)
  332. Prof. Wilson; **H. Raeburn** (RSA)
  333. The Hon. Mrs Graham; **T. Gainsborough** (B.M)

- 334. The Disobedient Prophet; **J. Graham** (RSA)
- 335. Dr Adam; **H. Raeburn** (B.M.)
- 336. Medallion in Bronze of Sir Francis Chantrey (RSA)
- 337. Viscount Melville; **Smith** (BM)
- 338. The Virgin in Glory; **Zurbaran** (RI)
- 339. Nine Drawings by **Tourny** from the picture of the Coronation of the Virgin, by Fra Angelico de Fiesole (RI)

## APPENDIX II

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### COPY OF ADVERTISEMENT, FROM VARIOUS NEWSPAPERS, OF THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF SCOTLAND'S OPENING, 1859

The National Gallery will be opened to the Public on Tuesday the 22d instant, and will afterwards remain open every Week, under the following regulations, viz.: - Tuesday, Wednesday, and Saturday - *Free Days*.

Open from 10 A.M. to 4 P.M., from 1st October to 31st January, *November excepted*; and from 10 A.M. to 5 P.M., from 1st Feb to 30th September. Admission *Gratis*.

*On and after Wednesday the 6th of April next*, the Gallery will be open from 7 to 9 P.M., on Wednesday Evenings, on payment of *Sixpence* for one Person, or *One Shilling* for a Party of Three Persons; and at the same hours on Saturday Evenings, *Free*.

Thursday and Friday - *Copying Days for Artists and Students*. Admission for Study *only*, by Copying Ticket (*Gratis*), from 10 A.M. to 4 P.M.

Copying Tickets will be issued by the Secretary, at the Office of the Board, Royal Institution, upon application and proof of qualification.

On Copying Days the Gallery will be open to the Public on payment of *Sixpence* for each Person.

For the present, the Gallery will be closed on Monday for Cleaning, Labelling the Pictures, and other arrangements, and no admission will be granted.

The Gallery will also be closed during the month of November.

Catalogues to be obtained at the Door, price *sixpence*.

Umbrellas, Sticks etc., cannot be taken into the Gallery, but may be deposited in the Hall on payment of *One Penny* for each article.

By Order of the Board.

**B. F. PRIMROSE,**  
secretary.

## APPENDIX III

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### ANNUAL ABSTRACT RETURNS OF THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF SCOTLAND (NG 6/4/1)

<u>Year</u>	<u>Admissions</u>	<u>Free</u>	<u>Sixpence</u>	<u>Copiers</u>	<u>Catalogues</u>
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<b><u>1859</u></b>	<b>72,035</b>	<b>67,463</b>	<b>4,110</b>	<b>462</b>	<b>4,370</b>
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(Catalogues sold at shilling = 235; at sixpence = 4,135. Brolly and stick fees = £45. Attendance on Saturday evenings = 8,569; average of 357 on each Saturday evening).

<b><u>1860</u></b>	<b>90,507</b>	<b>84,864</b>	<b>4,216</b>	<b>1,427</b>	<b>3,327</b>
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(Catalogues sold on large paper = 123; at shilling = 737; at sixpence = 2,467. Brolly fees around £58. Attendance on Saturday evenings = 13,220; average of 286 on each Saturday evening).

<b><u>1861</u></b>	<b>96,568</b>	<b>91,961</b>	<b>3,059</b>	<b>1,548</b>	<b>2,296</b>
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(Catalogues sold on large paper = 13; at shilling = 366; at sixpence = 1,917. Brolly fees around £54. Attendance on Saturday evenings = 15,872; average of 345 on each sat evening).

<b><u>1862</u></b>	<b>94,973</b>	<b>91,061</b>	<b>2,429</b>	<b>1,483</b>	<b>1,794</b>
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(Catalogues sold on large paper = 7; at shilling = 290 , at sixpence = 1,497. Brolly fees around £50. Attendance on Saturday evenings = 15,112; average of 336 on each Saturday evening).

<b><u>1863</u></b>	<b>108,058</b>	<b>104,076</b>	<b>2,751</b>	<b>1,231</b>	<b>2,057</b>
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(Catalogues sold on large paper = 10; at shilling = 252; at sixpence = 1,795. Brolly fees around £63. Attendance on Saturday evenings = 16,758; average of 364 on each Saturday evening).

<b><u>1864</u></b>	<b>109,998</b>	<b>105,683</b>	<b>3,195</b>	<b>1,120</b>	<b>2,427</b>
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(Catalogues sold on large paper = 5; at a shilling = 0; at sixpence = 2,422. Brolly fees around £60. Attendance on Saturday evenings = 14,598; average of 317 each Saturday evening).



<u>Year</u>	<u>Admissions</u>	<u>Free</u>	<u>Sixpence</u>	<u>Copiers</u>	<u>Catalogues</u>
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<b><u>1865</u></b>	<b>117,078</b>	<b>112,136</b>	<b>3,757</b>	<b>1,185</b>	<b>2,957</b>
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(Catalogues sold on large paper = 14; at a shilling = 0; at sixpence = 2,943. Brolly fees around £78. Attendance on Saturday evenings = 16,946; average of 365 each Saturday evening).

<b><u>1866</u></b>	<b>116,283</b>	<b>110,205</b>	<b>4,436</b>	<b>1,642</b>	<b>3,079</b>
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(Catalogues sold on large paper = 4; at a shilling = 0; at sixpence = 3,075. Brolly fees around £86. Attendance on Saturday evenings = 15,630; average of 342 on each Saturday evening).

<b><u>1867</u></b>	<b>110,129</b>	<b>103,406</b>	<b>4,755</b>	<b>1,968</b>	<b>2,748</b>
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(Catalogues sold on large paper = 4; at a shilling = 0; at sixpence = 2,744. Brolly fees around £84. Attendance on Saturday evenings = 14,365; average of 312 on each Saturday evening).

<b><u>1868</u></b>	<b>104,158</b>	<b>97,088</b>	<b>4,770</b>	<b>2,300</b>	<b>2,903</b>
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(Catalogues sold on large paper = 40; at a shilling = 0; at sixpence = 2,863. Brolly fees around £74. Attendance on Saturday evenings = 14,077; average of 319 on each Saturday evening).

<b><u>1869</u></b>	<b>127,544</b>	<b>119,632</b>	<b>5,300</b>	<b>2,612</b>	<b>2,911</b>
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(Catalogues sold on large paper = 2; at a shilling = 0; at sixpence = 2,909. Brolly fees around £86. Attendance on Saturday evenings = 17,250; average of 338 on each Saturday evening).

<b><u>1870</u></b>	<b>126,534</b>	<b>118,083</b>	<b>5,777</b>	<b>2,674</b>	<b>2,713</b>
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(Catalogues sold on large paper = 0; at shilling = 0; at sixpence = 2,713. Brolly fees around £83. Attendance on Saturday evenings = 17,014; average of 379 on each Saturday evening).

### **Comparison**

<b><u>1927</u></b>	<b>88,754</b>	<b>71,927</b>	<b>4,043</b>	<b>655</b>	<b>1,079</b>
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(school attendance = 12,129)

# Edinburgh, Romanticism and the National Gallery of Scotland

NICK PRIOR

## National galleries – France to America (via Scotland)

A frequently made claim is that art institutions are an integral component of any art world configuration.<sup>1</sup> The existence of an art museum is testament to the relatively autonomous status of an art field. We are likely to encounter such institutions in art fields that are 1) fully developed or developing and, therefore, also contain the key accoutrements of empowering art world personnel, discourses and institutions;<sup>2</sup> and 2) have attained a *degree* of autonomy. As Bourdieu suggests, the eclipse of the patronage system which ended dependence upon royal commissions and church programmes initiated the development, culminating in the nineteenth century, of the ideology of the 'pure aesthetic' – of the work as 'irreducible product of creation', the artist as subjective and monadic 'genius' and the 'pure gaze' capable of contemplating the 'pure' work 'in and for itself'.<sup>3</sup> Hence, the emergence of the 'aesthetic consciousness' is a *parallel* condition of the museum project – for it is only when artworks attain a form of 'pure' status that it is possible to conceive of housing them in an institution whose sole function is that of exhibiting and celebrating works as objects 'in and for themselves'.<sup>4</sup>

As Malraux has written: 'So vital is the part played by the art museum in our approach to works of art today that we find it difficult to realize that no museums exist, none has ever existed, in lands where the civilization of modern Europe is, or was, unknown; and that even amongst us, they have existed for barely two hundred years'. They

1 C. Duncan and D. Wallach, 'The universal survey museum', *Art History*, 3 (1980), 4; M. Pointon, *Art Apart: Art Institution and Ideology Across England and North America* (New York, 1994); G. Waterfield (ed.), *Palaces of Art: Art Galleries in Britain 1790–1900* (London, 1991).

2 H. Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley, 1982).

3 P. Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (Cambridge, 1993).

4 *Ibid.*; A. Malraux, *The Voices of Silence* (London, 1954).

expanded so much in the nineteenth century, says Malraux, and have become such a taken-for-granted part of our lives today 'that we forget that they have imposed on the spectator a wholly new attitude towards the work of art'.<sup>5</sup>

Sketching the institutional conditions which led to the foundation of the National Gallery of Scotland is a complex affair. Part of the problem lies with the fact that there is no key instant when the gallery was 'born'. Unlike the case of the Louvre, where the French Republican government of 1789 seized the royal collection and declared the museum a symbol for the overthrow of absolutism, the National Gallery of Scotland developed over forty years of progress in the art world in Edinburgh.

Systems of patronage were always fragmented and incomplete in Britain. Sources which flourished on the continent – church, court and state, in particular, remained minor agents in Britain. In Scotland this scarcity was even more pointed. Calvinism was a highly potent force in Scotland and the Kirk's strictures against sensuous imagery, subconscious thoughts and devotional iconography tempered any possibility of a sixteenth- or seventeenth-century tradition in the visual arts as in music and literature. Moreover, royal patronage, never strong in Britain anyway, was largely absent in Scotland after the court left for London in the early seventeenth century. State sponsorship of the arts which, again, was an important dynamic in the development of art worlds on the continent, was disordered and half-hearted in Britain. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, British state minimalism eschewed the provision of central funds for the purchase of art, instead encouraging private forms of patronage such as gifts and bequests. What little support there was for cultural activities was dissolved in Scotland when the Treaty of Union of 1707 removed the Scottish Parliament and left Scotland a nation without a state. To this extent, Scotland suffered doubly in terms of state patronage: the absence of a central state body of its own was compounded by the reluctance of a British state, itself, to sponsor cultural practice.

For these reasons, the particular line of art museum development in Scotland during the nineteenth century resembles the later American model more than it does the earlier French one, with England, whose National Gallery was founded in 1824, somewhere in between France and Scotland.<sup>6</sup> Like America, and following England, Scotland came to rely on

5 *Ibid.*, 86.

6 There are three points which evince the homologies between Scottish and American lines of museum development. Firstly, both countries had to deal with the desideratum of a burgeoning art tradition due, largely, to the patronage gap (see L. Goodrich, *Art of the United States: 1670–1966* (New York, 1966)). Secondly, this gap was filled in both cases by private, individual interests. Initially, as in Scotland, America's art institutions were controlled by members of the traditional professions and the landed classes. But slowly patrician power and sensibility gave way to bourgeois rationality and control, with institutions of high art emerging as part of middle-class and upper middle-class formation (see S. Zukin, 'Art in the arms of power: market relations and collective patronage in the capitalist state', *Theory and Society*, 11 (1982), 423–51). Thirdly, the rise of

the landed faction to fill the patronage gap and lead in matters of taste and culture. New standards of comfort and luxury enjoyed by this group after the Union suited a leisured lifestyle based on taste and fashion. This was indexed by the building of country houses – important both as a symbolic display of wealth and authority and as a repository for the collection of old masters which aristocrats were amassing by the turn of the century. Old masters had a particularly high status among gentlemen, scholars and connoisseurs in Edinburgh because they embodied Reynolds' dictates concerning the cultivation of a Grand Manner in art which admitted only the highly abstract, ideal and general, and excluded circumstantial detail and reference to the particular. The proximity to England (and Europe), here, was a clear advantage to Scotland's 'men of taste' seeking to emulate the high cultural practices and preferences south of the border.

Following the example set by the British Institution for Promoting the Fine Arts in the United Kingdom, founded in London in 1805, the Institution for the Encouragement of Fine Arts in Scotland was set up in Edinburgh in 1819. The institution, which had around 100 to 150 members, drawn from the nobility and aristocracy, sought to exhibit old master paintings, the private property of individual members and formed a collection of ancient art which was later to form part of the National Gallery collection. With the exhaustion of the market in old masters the Institution, which by 1827 had received a royal charter, was forced to show the work of modern artists and admitted sixteen artists as associate members. In essence, the Institution was a group of aristocratic patrons in the old sense of the term. By claiming the status of a 'disinterested', 'civic minded' and 'virtuous' organization, this coterie of dilettanti strove to control the morphology of the art field, and, in particular, the conduct of its artists.

The Royal Institution received a grant from another key player in the art field in the early nineteenth century, the Board of Trustees for Manufacturers in Scotland, a 'proto-quango' organization of the British state. Indeed, cross-membership between these two organizations was high. Founded in 1727, the Board consisted of a group of wealthy gentlemen – mainly barristers, nobles, law lords and the gentry, whose aim it was to promote economic development in Scotland through the encouragement of herring fisheries, linen and hemp manufacturing and coarse wool. Under a vision of some potency that the production of

substantial art museums – the National Gallery of Scotland in 1851, the Metropolitan Museum in New York and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, both in 1870 – came to rest less on direct state initiative and national control, and more on the interests and conflicts of civic, urban elites. Hence, whilst most art museums in America before 1910 were established at the local level as an urban cultural resource, with the city authorities providing and maintaining the buildings, in Edinburgh, it is possible to ground the siting of the National Gallery in a broader movement of urban civility (see A.J. Youngson, *The Making of Classical Edinburgh* (Edinburgh, 1966)).



luxury items was a worthy and beneficial activity,<sup>7</sup> the Board established a drawing academy in 1760 for improvements in design for household goods in order to make such objects of utility attractive for export. It also offered cash inducements for good practice and held exhibitions of prize work. As the needs of the fish, linen and woollen industries subsided, and by acts in 1828 and 1847, funds were redirected to the fine arts. The Board accumulated a large collection of ancient casts and marbles, as well as books, engravings and paintings for its school of design. It took custody of the Torrie collection in 1844 – a collection of 46 paintings (including Italian, Dutch and Flemish eighteenth-century pictures) and 39 marbles/bronzes, which was left to the nation and later formed the basis for the collection of the National Gallery of Scotland. In 1830 the Board exhibited the collection in the gallery of the Doric Royal Institution building – built in 1822 for various semi-private societies in the capital.

In the very early nineteenth century, then, the realm of art was still solidly that of the aristocracy and gentry and artists still saw in the landed classes their most significant source of patronage. In a more general sense, the position of the landowner in the stratification system in Scotland appeared to be secured rather than undermined as was the case in other parts of Europe. At a time when one might expect changes in Scottish economic and social structures to have a detrimental effect on the landed order between 1750 and 1820, the reverse seems to have happened.<sup>8</sup> But it would be a mistake to fail to register certain changes in the nature of Scotland's stratification system in the early nineteenth century. The evolution of bourgeois hegemony was gradual and complex but none the less detectable across a broad range of urban social institutions and discourses, partly undermining the traditional authority of the landed classes from early to mid-century. In religion, politics and law as well as intellectual thought, cultural consumption and education, middle-class interest was clearly gaining sway by the 1830s.<sup>9</sup> Underlying this new-found confidence was the general expansion of middle-class occupations with advances in domestic and overseas trade and the growth in urban manufacturing in Scotland's central belt. Clearly, ruralism and aristocratic traditions could not remain dominant in an increasingly urban-centred society.

In the art field itself this is testified to by the challenge which the aristocratic block was coming under from a group of resident artists in Edinburgh who were to form themselves into the Scottish Academy in 1826. The advent of the Scottish Academy heralded various changes in the structure of the art field by the 1830s – the professionalization and

7 S. Nenadic, 'Scottish fiction and the material world in the early nineteenth century', in A.J. Cummings and T.M. Devine (eds), *Industry, Business and Society in Scotland since 1700* (Edinburgh, 1994).

8 T. M. Devine (ed.), *Conflict and Stability in Scottish Society* (Edinburgh, 1990).

9 S. Nenadic, 'The rise of the urban middle classes', in T.M. Devine and R. Mitchison (eds), *People and Society in Scotland, vol. 1, 1760–1830* (Edinburgh, 1988).

individualization of art, the increased ability of indigenous artists to stay in Scotland and 'live by one's own brush', the appearance of annual, public exhibitions of modern art in the capital, the ability of professional artists to resist outside control, and the emergence of an open, bourgeois art market. As Lang has said, 'the artist can work for the culture of the upper strata of society until the culture of his own class becomes conscious and demanding'.<sup>10</sup> Such was the case by the 1830s as the Scottish Academy, granted a Royal Charter in 1838, gradually augmented its stakes in the art field.<sup>11</sup> Artists who previously had sought patronage under the auspices of the aristocratic Royal Institution, now flocked to the Academy, whose own personnel were moving into key positions in the Board of Manufactures and other important art bodies.

Part of the impetus for the rise to power of the Royal Scottish Academy (RSA) came from the formation of an organization which was to have vital effects on the intensification of the modern art market from the 1830s on – the Royal Association for the Promotion of Fine Arts in Scotland, or the Edinburgh Art Union. One of the first such unions in Britain, the Royal Association, founded in 1834, boasted up to 6,000 members worldwide and extended the patronage principle to a more middle-class public in the city. Members subscribed a guinea a year, the money being used to buy modern art, mainly landscapes, from the RSA exhibitions. It also provided members with popular engravings and the chance to win a painting in the annual lottery. By the 1840s, the Association had secured official recognition and, with the RSA, shaped the structure of the art field in profound ways. It also formed a fund to purchase selected pictures to become part of the National Gallery of Scotland's collection.

Inevitably, these four institutions came into conflict in the 1840s. With space so limited in Edinburgh, the potential to secure galleries was a key expression of standing: physical space, in this sense, gradually took the status of a form of 'cultural capital'. The lines of tension increasingly formed around the aristocratic Royal Institution and Board of Manufactures against the more bourgeois Art Union and Royal Scottish Academy. As tensions reached a critical stage and legal wranglings between the artists and the patrons threatened to split the city's art world, the British state felt it necessary to intervene and ordered an official inquiry into the affairs of all the institutions. Published in 1847, the report proposed a separate building for the Royal Scottish Academy and the national collection, which was to be put into the hands of the Board of Manufac-

10 P. H. Lang, 'Music and the court in the eighteenth century', in P. Fritz and D. Williams (eds), *City and Society in the Eighteenth Century* (Edinburgh, 1973), 151.

11 Enthusiastic acclaim greeted the RSA's annual exhibitions in the press and art journalism generally. 'Our Art and Exhibitions are unquestionably the best things our country can boast', enthused one critic, who continued, 'Put together our yearly crop of books, forensic speeches, and pulpit preachments, consider them, and then pass into the Academy's exhibition, and admit that the artists are clearly our best and cleverest body of men', *Iconoclast, Fine Art Pamphlets – Scottish* (Edinburgh, 1860), 4.

tures. Such a collection, the treasury believed, 'would provide for the inhabitants of Edinburgh opportunities which cannot be overestimated of rational amusement, mental cultivation and refinement of taste'. The building was eventually shared between the RSA and the National Gallery of Scotland, in effect, offering a kind of art world monopoly to the Academy.

The neo-classical temple, designed by Playfair, was built with funds provided by the Board of Manufactures from 1850, with the help of a £20,000 government grant. The building was opened in 1859 with a collection of 300 pictures, formed as a patchwork of private bequests and gifts and semi-public purchases. The collection was distributed among six rooms and ordered under the rudimentary categories of 'Ancient Masters' – foreigners of all periods – and 'British Artists', with no conception of different periods or a distinction between Scottish and English artists. Open three days a week *gratis* to the public, its presence at last expressed the existence of a developed and relatively autonomous art field in Edinburgh. The curator was chosen by the Board of Manufactures from a short list selected by the RSA.

### Landscape and art in Scotland

But there is another story to tell here. It is a story that points up the inadequacy of approaches to museum development which overstress the notion of a 'general museum idea'<sup>12</sup> (usually embodied in the Louvre model), without acknowledging the different sets of local, material conditions which prevail in any given art world. It is a story of romance and landscape; of Sir Walter Scott and the Highlands; of artistic sublimities and subjectivities. These were important forces in the explanation of why Edinburgh's art world 'took off' when it did.

Romanticism did not spring fully formed in early nineteenth-century Scotland, but came to develop during the latter half of the eighteenth century as a response to similar social and cultural developments faced by a number of Western societies. The paradox of its inception turns on the fact that it developed in the Enlightenment period of order, rationality, science and reason. In a sense, of course, it was a pointed repudiation of these values – a 'counter-movement' which stressed the mind, feeling, subjectivity and expressive freedom. The gradual shift to a romantic 'structure of feeling' in Scotland paralleled the slow waning of neo-classicism and the Augustan order. It was given impetus along the way through the work of certain writers whose elegiac scenes and characters were informed by an aristocratic rural simplicity. John Home's *Douglas* (1756) and MacPherson's translations of the poems of Ossian (1760s), portrayed a poetic Highland past and a remote, exotic world of

12 C. Duncan, 'Art museums and the ritual of citizenship', in I. Karp (ed.), *Exhibiting Cultures* (Edinburgh, 1991), 99.

rugged landscapes peopled by grand heroic characters. The popularity of these writings coincided with the nadir of Romanticism. By the early nineteenth century, Scotland, in Hook's words, was a 'kind of romantic archetype', 'the most romantic country in Europe' whose 'mythopoetic vision' was embodied in the works of the 'Wizard of the North' – Sir Walter Scott.<sup>13</sup>

Scott's presence towers over nineteenth-century Scotland in profound ways and it would be impossible to do justice to his significance here. The popularity of novels such as *Waverley* in 1814 and *The Heart of Midlothian* in 1818 has been attributed to Scott's focus on historical detail, costume and local setting. But equally significant was the bourgeois, quotidian quality of Scott's output – the inclusion of 'common' or 'middle of the road' heroes and the demise of the exclusive values of landed absolutism.<sup>14</sup> Scott exemplified the fact that Romanticism was a middle-class movement – 'the middle-class literary school *par excellence*, the school which had broken for good with the conventions of classicism, courtly-aristocratic rhetoric and pretence, with elevated style and refined language'.<sup>15</sup>

In the visual arts, the transition from the smooth and pleasing views of the picturesque to the more romantic trope of landscape representation followed the path which Scott had forged in his descriptions of wild, barren landscapes. Scott's literary evocations of the minutiae of highland scenery: 'ledges of rock', 'healthy and savage mountains, on the crests of which the morning mist was still sleeping', 'imperceptible notches', 'huge precipices', 'crag[s] of huge size presented in gigantic bulk'<sup>16</sup> were firmly ensconced in the public imagination. Illustrations to Scott's texts by Joseph Turner, who collaborated with him in 1818, and the Reverend John Thomson of Duddingston, an Edinburgh landscapist and minister of the Kirk who illustrated Scott's books on Scottish antiquities and scenery, began to convey a new enthusiasm for the bleak, stern, bold and solitary. Central to this enthusiasm was the unconventional style of rendering accidental effects in nature and the expression of subjective states and personal responses. Thomson's expressive handling of weather and sea effects has been termed 'the first thoroughly Romantic treatment of Scottish scenery'.<sup>17</sup> But it was Turner's vigorous depictions of the maelstrom of nature in the Highlands; of nature as awe-inspiring and infinite, quasi-divine and transcendent, which provided the most full-blooded treatment of Scott's vision.

13 A. Hook, 'Scotland and Romanticism: the international scene', in D. Gifford (ed.), *The History of Scottish Literature: the Nineteenth Century* (Edinburgh, 1989), 317, 318, 316.

14 G. Lukács, *The Historical Novel* (London, 1962), 33.

15 A. Hauser, *The Social History of Art*, vol. III: *Rococo, Classicism, Romanticism* (London, 1962), 166.

16 W. Scott, *Waverley* (Edinburgh, 1814), 144–5, 175.

17 A. G. Williams and A. Brown, *The Bigger Picture: a History of Scottish Art* (London, 1993), 133.



The key ingredient to early nineteenth-century landscapes turned on the affirmation of subjectivity – of individual expression and feeling, of weather conditions, moods and affections. This paralleled the loosening of patronage as bourgeois artists, with the rise of the Royal Scottish Academy and other exhibiting societies, were able to escape from aristocratic directives, practise in a variety of different styles and produce for an anonymous market. Romanticism helped to break down the hierarchy of genres according to which 'Grand Manner' or 'history-painting' had been presumed to be qualitatively superior to such genres as 'still-life' and 'landscape'. As a rule, artistic value was coming to depend on individual subjectivity and creativity as expressed through a swelling body of art criticism.

By the 1840s, landscape pictures in Scotland wholeheartedly embodied the 'rugged', 'realistic' and 'detailed' tendencies which were present in Scott. Shifts in ideas on landscape to the sublime aesthetic paralleled the rise of scenic tourism; itself dependent on improved communications which made the Highlands accessible by train in the 1840s.<sup>18</sup> Pictures still aimed to convey 'feeling', but in the Victorian period this was subjugated to the aim of conveying particularity and detail in recognizably local settings. Once characterized as vulgar, barren and barbarous by followers of the picturesque aesthetic, the mountains of the Highlands were now *de rigueur*. They represented solitude, the imagination, the soul, the infinite and the unyielding. They became the repository of a mythologized Scotland as the area was emptied and exploited for commercial gain.

Horatio McCulloch (1805–67) was the most popular high romantic landscape painter in Scotland. His idealized and particularized depictions of the Highlands from the 1840s to the 1860s, eventually epitomized, along with Edwin Landseer, Scotland's abiding image, from within and outwith. McCulloch was born in Glasgow but painted for most of his life in Edinburgh and gave true visual form to Scotland as 'land of the mountain and the flood'. Like other landscapists, McCulloch staged the Highlands as spatial repositories of counter-civilization; of the pathos of a conquered province, but through a one-dimensional aesthetic which actually elided the trace of the modernizing hand, urbanism and the rural poor.<sup>19</sup> The bourgeois penchant for verisimilitude and detail – the development of photography under the direction of D.O. Hill in Scotland is a parallel development – found expression in McCulloch's exact observations of individual elements in the landscape. His portrayal of variations in the texture and surface appearance of rocks, water and greenery, for instance, exemplified a fidelity to the details of nature which reached an

18 C. Withers, 'The historical creation of the Scottish highlands', in I. Donnachie and C. Whatley (eds), *The Manufacture of Scottish History* (Edinburgh, 1992).

19 For a discussion of this tendency in English landscape pictures see J. Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape* (Cambridge, 1980).

apogee in the 1850s and 1860s with followers of Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.

Exemplifying the penchant for landscape pictures were the actions of Edinburgh's Art Union from the mid-1830s. Before 1842, of the £22,000 spent on painting and sculpture of all types, about £12,700 had been spent on landscapes by the Union. In some years, up to 70 per cent of the Association's annual expenditure at the Royal Scottish Academy was spent on landscapes of one sort or another. Especially adored were John Thomson and Horatio McCulloch and the works of these artists were often engraved and distributed among subscribers. In 1837–38, for instance, McCulloch's 'Loch-an-Eilin' was chosen to be engraved by the Association, whose committee justified this choice in the following terms:

the recommendation this year was, that a work should be selected from the landscape department, which had long flourished in Scotland, and it would have been strange to him [the secretary of the committee] if it had not done so in a country such as this – a country the fit nurse of poetical imaginations – *the land of the mountain and the flood; a land which contains within itself all the features of loneliness, of majesty, and sublimity; a land whose grandeur and beauty, both in the Lowlands and Highlands, has been increased by the increase of knowledge, and the progress of art, the useful arts themselves having shed additional beauty and grandeur on the beautiful and sublime features of nature.*<sup>20</sup>

Similar tones of Romanticism tinged the activities of the Union throughout the period in question and fuelled the purchase of localized, detailed and 'sentimental' landscapes and seascapes.<sup>21</sup> Academy artists quickly tapped into this burgeoning market. The takings at Academy summer exhibitions which hardly reached £400 in the early 1830s, had risen to over £4,000 by 1838, including nearly £3,000 spent by the Association. Artists tended to paint what they knew they could sell at exhibitions. And what they could sell at exhibitions, apart from portraiture, which was always popular, was landscape painting, broadly in the romantic/realist idiom. Royal Scottish Academy catalogues, for example, show a rising quantity of localized, often Highland scenes in the 1830s, with titles such as: 'River Scene in Argyllshire', 'Scene at Pass of Ben-Cruachan' or 'Ben Nevis – Scene after a Thunder Shower'. Indeed, by 1838, academy artists were clearly exploiting this thirst in the market, necessitating the Union to complain that artists had put up their prices and that art was in danger of becoming 'a matter of traffic'.<sup>22</sup>

20 Royal Association for the Promotion of Fine Arts, *Annual Report* (1837–38), 124, my emphasis.

21 A point which must escape development at present turns on the relationship between the ideas of Romanticism, especially the stress on novelty, self-expression and varied experience, and the aggrandizement of the art market, at this time. Romanticism may well have freed up the necessary motivations to purchase works of art by encouraging modern habits of consumption generally among the middle classes in Scotland (see C. Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford, 1987)).

22 Royal Association for the Promotion of Fine Arts, *Annual Report* (1838–39), 16–17.

One of the outcomes of the popularization and romanticization of the landscape idiom in the early nineteenth century was the proliferation of visual media which depicted nature or landscape. As well as illustrations in novels, engravings and photography, the visual spectacle of nature was widely disseminated through fine art books, travel and tourist literature, guide books, mementos, postcards, souvenirs, relics and stationery. Landscape images were a recurrent feature of urban luxury commodities now being purchased by a visually hungry middle class, itself partially freed from the restrictions on consumption and the taboos on free time.<sup>23</sup> The aestheticization of the landscape and the Highlands, of course, was a process with long historical roots, but in the 1840s and 1850s the scope of the commodity reached new heights. With the purchase of Balmoral by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, in 1848, came the acceleration of the pageantry of tartanry and the cult of a non-threatening Jacobitism which has had lasting consequences on Scottish national identity. But a by-product must also have been the production of an internal middle-class public well-versed in the codes of landscape representation and the image in general. Hence, by 1859, when the National Gallery of Scotland was opened to the public, an appreciative, informed audience possessed of the correct faculties for approaching such images may well have been formed, in part, in and through this visual spectacle of nature. In other words, as Scotland's National Gallery was *sited* in the 1850s, so an urban constituency of gallery-goers equipped with new modes of visual consumption was '*sighted*', in the sense of being familiarized with the (almost pure) aesthetic and the visual.

The point, of course, should not be overstated. The primacy of the ocular and the ability to 'appreciate' gallery art was also dependent on a whole set of other considerations – class distinction, art education, state expansion and the appearance of other visually oriented media in the lives of the urban middle classes – libraries, theatres, sporting events, magazines, public parks, centres of commodity consumption and so on. But to deny the salience of Romanticism and the landscape trope would be to deny a prime cultural force in the maturation of the art field in early nineteenth-century Scotland. Hence, before the 1800s, despite the amelioration in the conditions of a small number of artists and short-lived attempts to found academies in the capital, Edinburgh possessed very few artistic institutions or facilities – that is, no developed production, dissemination and reception mechanisms. Most artists, in fact, were forced to seek 'proper' patronage and fine art training abroad, mostly in Rome. By the 1840s and 1850s the situation could not be more dissimilar. Edinburgh had a Royal Academy, 'bourgeois' art unions, a vibrant art market, public exhibitions, a unitary body of aristocratic patrons, an active fine art education system, a diverse group of native, professional

23 W.H. Fraser and R.J. Morris (eds), *People and Society in Scotland*, vol. II, 1830–1914 (Edinburgh, 1990).

artists, and, a national gallery in the making. As Henry Cockburn wrote with regard to practising artists in 1811: 'the arts thus brought to light, advanced systematically and there were more and better, and better-paid artists in Edinburgh in the next fifteen years than there had been in Scotland in the preceding century'.<sup>24</sup>

In conclusion, the role of Romanticism here, then, was to act as a catalyst and a cultural legitimator whose presence almost overdetermines the development of the art field in Scotland. Its effect, when conjoined with the potent landscape idiom, was to compensate for the lack of a developed art configuration in the eighteenth century. Despite losing impetus from mid-century, its initial drive was enough to keep the art world in motion. In accordance with the role it played in other European countries, Romanticism was to open up new possibilities for the development of art institutions in Edinburgh, including its National Gallery, and to break down obstacles to this development.

This point can be concretized with a brief contrast between Germany and America. Romanticism in the former country emerged in the eighteenth century as an artistic, literary and philosophical movement with absolute impulses towards the artist's need to succumb to interior feeling and the hermeneutic.<sup>25</sup> Apart from the security of the artist which this expression implied, one of the outcomes of the German Romantic movement was the building of galleries as spiritual temples to art. In America, on the other hand, for various economic, social and cultural reasons, Romanticism came in a weaker form and later, as did its art museums. The crucial dynamic of a vigorous bourgeois art field was absent in America, until middle-class power and taste were secured and literary romanticism had begun to make inroads into the popular imagination.

University of Edinburgh

24 Cited in E. Gordon, *The Royal Scottish Academy 1826-1976* (Edinburgh, 1976), 5.

25 Hauser, *The Social History of Art*.



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